

He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.”

[Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods*]

PROLOGUE	3
01 PROCRASTINATION: THE THIEF OF TIME	5
02 AN OSMOTIC PERSPECTIVE OF PROCRASTINATION.....	6
03 INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY	7
04 THE CONTINUUM CONCEPT	9
05 THE MANUAL LABOR THEORY	10
06 PROCRASTINATION AND SLOTH	12
07 PROCRASTINATION AND THE COGNITIVE REVOLUTION.....	13
08 CARPE DIEM!	14
09 HOMO ILLUMENS AND THE ENLIGHTENED PLAYGROUND	14
10 ESTABLISHING A HABIT OF PURPOSEFULNESS.....	16
11 Belphegor: Instant Gratification Monkey's Best Pal	17
12 PROCRASTINATION AND IGNORANCE	19
14 PROCRASTINATION AND DEPRESSION	19
15 PROCRASTINATION AND THE BODY	21
16 PROCRASTINATION AND FAITH	23
17 PROCRASTINATION AND INTUITION	25
18 PROCRASTINATION AND SUICIDE.....	27
19 PROCRASTINATION AND CULTURE.....	35
20 PROCRASTINATION AND EDUCATION.....	45
EPILOGUE	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49
SLIDE OVERVIEW	51

Abstract

This essay contends that procrastination is increasingly not a psychopathological condition, but a state of mind into which cultural frame conditions push the human being. While a flood of fitness apps and self-help literature suggest to the modern individual that it has to fight harder in order to function properly, I defend humanity and put the blame for procrastination on our social systems.

The reader is introduced to the concept of exogenous and endogenous procrastination as a terminology which differentiates between cultural causes and psychopathological causes that allow such a diagnosis. With procrastination being only a mild form of psychopathological behavior, which starts a spectrum that stretches over depression to suicide, this paper calls for a transformation of our education systems and a culture which allows more play.

Written in 2016/17 in Shanghai, where the author had spent two decades in total and several years thereof in the automation industry, it suggests that the compressed industrial revolution of Far East Asian societies will most likely lead to at least temporarily higher levels of mental health issues than this is the case in Western industrialized economies where societies had more than a century to digest the impact of technological transformation.

Prologue¹

A recent writing block forced me to look into procrastination, with which I had been sort of stigmatized by a friend in the process of starting a PhD program. Surprisingly, I spent much time thinking about monism and dualism. Are body and soul one or are they two separate entities? Monism is the theory that denies the distinction or duality in a particular sphere, such as that between body and mind, or God and the world. The question of whether I adhere to the group of monistic or dualistic thinkers bothers me since my first essay at age 17. I have intuitively always considered myself a monist but was never able to completely rule out dualism. This time, I offer a triad of perspectives on procrastination, from the body, from the mind and from the soul; recognizing their separateness and their natural traction to become one. The answer to this debate must be then an 'and' instead of an 'either or'.

I furthermore propose three remedies to endogenous procrastination, i.e. procrastination in a narrow sense of somebody being the cause of not doing the work

that should be done. Cognitive behavioral therapy for the mind, bioenergetics and more manual labor for the body and faith for the soul.¹¹ As unsexy as this might sound, in particular for a long-term atheist like myself, this is one of the conclusions to where this essay has taken me. My second conclusion is however of more significance: Exogenous procrastination, i.e. procrastination in a wider sense of a cultural system being the cause of an individual not doing the work it should get done, is to be accounted for the overwhelming majority of procrastination cases. With procrastination being only a mild form of a psychopathological behavior, which starts a spectrum that stretches over depression to suicide, this paper calls for a transformation of our education systems and a culture which allows more play.

As temple to the soul God bestowed the body upon man. [Karl Maertin]¹

It is the body, which interests me most, because I strongly believe that it – not the mind – is key to understand most psychopathological behavior. Latest findings of human development psychology need to be merged with body centered atonement practices; our societies and in particular our education systems need to acknowledge that 250 years of industrialization caused not only man's alienation from manual work but also from his body. In order to recover a sound body-mind equilibrium, we have to balance intellectual work with manual work. Procrastination, i.e. in plain evolutionary terms means **not taking the next proper step** as an individual, an organization or a society. It can be overcome by re-establishing that body-mind equilibrium. We have to move back into what I would like to call an **enlightened playground**, i.e. merging what we have to do with what we enjoy doing.

I will use in here the popular psychological term *procrastination* as a pivot to dissect the reason for psychopathological behavior and I will propose an answer to this admittedly grand question: How can we create a culture which reduces procrastination and enlarges the enlightened playground, i.e. let more people have more fun in doing what makes sense? One major takeaway of this paper is the realization that a **contracted industrial revolution is a central cause for higher suicide rates in Fareast Asian nations than the global average**. A major research question arises from online research in regard to China, which seems to break with the trajectory of its Fareast Asian cousin nations.

One of my favorite podcasts, the TED Radio Hour hosted by Guy Raz, broadcasted on August 26, 2016 an [entire show on procrastination](#). It wraps up both writer Tim Urban's and organizational psychologist Adam Grant's talks on procrastination and adds some other thoughts on slowing down. Self-described catholic masochist and much cherished thinker Günther Klein sent me after reading a draft of this essay a podcast published on September 14th, 2016 by [Wharton Business School](#) titled *Pushing Past Procrastination*. It

¹ [Karl Maertin](#), Hymnen des Steinmetzen: *Der Seele zum Tempel gab Gott den Leib*.

features NYT journalist Phyllis Korkki, who wrote a book about how to complete projects even if you are a lazy, self-doubting procrastinator. Procrastination is clearly trending – for various reasons - and answering this question is a timely attempt.

I contend in the following pages that we have created cultures which push us into procrastination, but blame the individuum, therefore. An exponential rise in self-help literature confirms this almost global trend. While most authors which I have read on the subject of scientific or non-scientific self-help try to improve individual performance, I argue here eventually for a cultural change, which optimizes collective performance.

01 Procrastination: The Thief of Time

^{III}Dithering, delaying tactics, dilatoriness, stalling, temporizing, hesitation, vacillation, humming and hawing, dilly-dallying, shilly-shallying, kicking the can down the road. Procrastination: the action of delaying or postponing something. Procrastination is the thief of time and it's entertainingly explained in [Tim Urban](#)'s TED talk as yet another form of sloth: the instant gratification monkey mutinies against the rational decision maker and takes control over the rudder i.e. brain. Urban does also provide an important differentiation between short term and long-term procrastination by bringing the panic monster as metaphor for fear of failure and shame into play. Writers, creatives, start-up entrepreneurs and graduate students are not subject to short term deadlines and therefore are bereft of the panic monster, i.e. the only force which is capable to scare the instant gratification monkey off the ship and into the sticks. We could therefore be led to believe procrastination is always caused by an individual's failure to perform properly. Well, I want to argue against this understanding and will provide here a more nuanced explanation of endogenous and exogenous factors causing procrastination; or for the purpose of this treatise in short **endogenous** and **exogenous procrastination**.^{IV}

Urban explains a Venn diagram in his talk, which shows an overlap between the action radius of the instant gratification monkey and the rational decision maker. The overlap is well deserved relaxation time, i.e. time when we charge our batteries by having a good meal, getting a decent nap, or watching our favorite soap. The first thing that occurs to me is this: The overlap area should be much larger. Somber sleep alone, without which we can not perform properly, ideally makes up 1/3 of our lives. We can surely argue whether we look here at conscious time spent only, but will see that it all boils down to consciousness anyway.

Urban calls the exclusive area of the instant gratification monkey^V the dark playground, which is easy and fun, but causes feelings of guilt, remorse and self-hatred, because it does not make sense. I have a hunch that we don't linger in the dark playground only because of our own incompetence to move into the make-sense work space. Urban asks

how it is possible to empower the rational decision maker, to get the things done that make sense. He brings a third protagonist on stage:^{VI} the panic monster. He argues that the panic monster wakes up from hibernation when dreadful consequences loom over us like losing our face in public or missing a deadline which puts our job at risk. The panic monster does therefore only work for short term procrastination, Urban claims. In the case of long term projects, which include things like our health, relationships, etc. the panic monster stays dormant until the very last moment when its mostly too late to turn the ship around.

02 An Osmotic Perspective of Procrastination

The question which I ask here is this: if we all have this panic monster, why is it then that some people perform despite being brought off course by the gratification monkey and others don't? why is it that some people like Tim Urban himself venture into successful careers but others end up homeless? Urban provides a funny simplification for a complex mental process, but there is an important explanation missing here, which if not added, puts many procrastinators to the believe that they are lazy dogs doing nothing other than easy-and-fun things. They would be a huge success in the animal kingdom, as Urban tells us, but they are an utter failure as human being. For some people this must sound like an invitation to commit instant suicide.^{VII} Of course, you gotta kill the schizophrenic monkey separately.

Well, here is what I think: there are a few other reasons for not being able to move into the make-sense-area of the rational decision maker. Lots of people procrastinate not because they like to spend most of their time in the dark playground or lack grit as psychologist [Angelina Lee Duckworth](#)'s research demonstrates. It's either because their personal psychological frame makes it hard for them to concentrate and succeed or sociological pressures prevent them from. Both Duckworth and Urban focus their explanations of why people succeed on purely individual reasons. That's certainly a short-sighted view, because we are not isolated from the rest of the world and constantly have to deal with what happens around us; in other words: ^{VIII} there are many gratification monkeys outside our brain causing chaos, mayhem and pandemonium.

I believe quite on the contrary that we need to take all existing layers of our societies into account and try to adopt an osmotic perspective.^{2 IX} To get the work done, which makes

² The osmotic concept perceives both an individual and an organization as not completely separated from its environment but protected and encapsuled by an permeable membrane. In other words the smallest biological organism, a single cell, is in terms of interaction with its surroundings identical with the largest organizations we can think of. I was first introduced to the concept by Prof. Helmut Renöckl, and I couldn't help but being completely captivated by this analogy between biology and sociology. Prof.

sense, requires the individual to be ready and willing to do that work. All factors which put off the proper next step and are attributed to the individual only, cause *endogenous procrastination*. It does though also require a person's intimate network of family and friends to be supportive. Think of abusive parents as the worst example of being not supportive.³ Most of us are part of organizational systems and most of us have experienced that there are work environments which are conducive to get our jobs done and others are utterly destructive.⁴ And even though some of us would like to live in anarchy, we all do live in a nationhood or some other form of municipal, provincial or federal government system. The difference between such systems clearly has an impact on whether we are enabled to do our work and grow as human beings or not.⁵ The individual is only one sphere of creation and creativity, as it is only one source of procrastination within the complex system of a society; and all factors putting off the proper next step, which lie outside of the individual, thus cause *exogenous procrastination*.

The classic writer's block appears in most of our lives if not being a writer in the form of a speaker's block. It occurs when we are supposed to write or say certain things in a certain form, but because of some mental conditioning or sheer self-will are incapable of doing so. My favorite example is Sting's^x account of his eight year-long creative desert, which turns into a thunderstorm of words after he puts himself in second place and starts to write in his native dialect about the people from his hometown, a vessel building harbor city in North England. I recommend to watch Sting's inspiring [TED talk](#) to understand that in an osmotic perspective ego procrastination means ignorance towards other layers of society, respectively, all that is, if we take the view of transpersonal psychology.⁶

03 Increasing Productivity^{xI}

Before we go into the details of exogenous procrastination, I would like to elaborate on how procrastination is generally understood and which means are available to reach an obvious end: **reduce or eliminate procrastination and increase personal and organizational productivity**. It is important to understand that for the purpose of increasing one's personal or organizational productivity, we do not need to differentiate

Renöckl applies the osmotic concept not only in his university teaching, but also practically for his consulting assignments.

³ Compare German [case of extreme child neglect](#)

⁴ Concentration or labor camps being on the very dark side of the spectrum.

⁵ Self-proclaimed warriors of democracy should be aware why they fought against Bolshevik communism and now fight against fundamentalist Islam. In particular authors of the sort like Henry Kissinger who has written with World Order a manifesto for democracy but fails to observe the destructive social effects of the system he defends to vehemently.

⁶ Transpersonal Psychology is concerned with the study of humanity's highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.

whether the decrease in productivity is caused by endogenous factors or exogenous factors. However, it's equally important to realize that most self-help as well as professional psychological material I have found doesn't differentiate either. Procrastination and not being productive enough (from whatever POV) are rather meshed into one pot of anxiety being stirred by our own pain bodies, charlatan professionals who make a living of others' fears and are an reflection of an economic system which only looks at material growth measured in GDP, shareholder profits and annual net salaries.

A good starting point is Dr. Travis Bradberry who runs in the US a HR development consultancy called Talentsmart.⁷ His weekly posts on emotional intelligence and productivity boosting work habits are hugely popular on LinkedIn, where he enjoys a substantial global followership of several thousand. I kept track of his posts like 'Critical things ridiculously successful people do every morning'⁸ for a while and read the comments by other LinkedIn users being astonished that each of his posts prompted hundreds of opinions, some of substantial length. The upside here is that people are aware that emotional intelligence has its indisputable place next to rational intelligence; something, we wouldn't have dreamed of just 20 years ago. The downside is, that Bradberry succeeded to pervert Daniel Goleman's original idea⁹ into a business, which promises to transform a looser into a winner with a quick fix. People seem to be addicted to this concept, but fail to understand that our societies have no need for more successful people, but like the Dalai Lama said, are in dire *need of peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kind*.^{XII}

From a meta perspective we have to notice that emotional intelligence, which was – I am now simplifying for the purpose of making an argument - a well meant new approach of substituting rational intelligence competition with emotional intelligence cooperation, has been laundered into a major HR and organizational development weapon, which is used to fuel a cold business war and tunes perfectly into the canon of national innovation strategies.¹⁰ The popularity of Bradberry's posts on LinkedIn and Talentsmart's own endorsement 'More than 75% of the Fortune 500 companies rely on our products and services' make a paradigm shift safe to assume and reveal, that we ought to change our educational systems first. Otherwise, all well intended teachings will be corrupted into means for a competitive power game rather than a purposeful development. Some enterprises have understood pretty quick that their investments in research, development and IP protection have to be complemented with investments in HR

⁷ <http://www.talentsmart.com/>

⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/critical-things-ridiculously-successful-people-do-every-bradberry?trk=hp-feed-article-title-comment>
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/12-ways-successful-people-boost-their-productivity/>

⁹ Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence – Why it can matter more than IQ; Scientific America Inc. (1994)

¹⁰ see, for example, James McGregor's excellent paper on [China's Drive for 'Indigenous Innovation'](#)

development. To be fair, they mostly understood the requirement for the latter only after they learned that it increases competitiveness.

*“Watch your thoughts, they become words;
watch your words, they become actions;
watch your actions, they become habits;
watch your habits, they become character;
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”*

[Upanishads, a part of the Vedas, are ancient Sanskrit texts that contain some of the central philosophical concepts and ideas of Hinduism]

If we forget about all the above-mentioned misconceptions and the general misunderstanding that our sole target is not merely increasing productivity, but also balancing productivity with purposefulness, benevolence and enjoyment, we can surely identify a few habits that will help to move faster in one direction. There are myriads of books, articles and visualizations available preaching those habits, the very essence which I believe needs to be understood is though related to our own energy economy.^{XIII} The English term economy is derived from classic Greek oikos and nomos, which means house and order respectively. An economy, no matter which size, is therefore a system that operates under certain conditions and according to certain rules or in the case of humans, habits.¹¹

If we assume that homo sapiens has a maximum life expectancy of 120 years and an average of 80 years, we will see that the human heart beats more than three billion times throughout one's life. These are the economical frame conditions for a human heart, which are certainly different from the ones, for example, an elephant has to deal with. Insofar, it can't be our objective to stress ourselves, increase our heartbeat and press into each one of our days ever more tasks. Such a mindset will only shorten our life and make it miserable, even with the most advanced medical technology available. Increasing productivity is about recognizing our own energy levels and balancing our body-mind towards more efficacy. Being able to identify important tasks from useless ones and allocating one's resources thereon is hence of paramount importance. It is moreover about recognizing our organic nature as opposed to the mechanistic nature which is celebrated by fascist-industrial systems.

04 The Continuum Concept

¹¹ *The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel.* [Piet Mondrian]

An explanation model which is in my point of view most appropriate to explain the phenomenon of multi-layered procrastination has been developed by psychotherapist [Jean Liedloff](#) in her 1975 book [The Continuum Concept](#). She argues that *human beings have an innate set of expectations that our evolution as a species has designed us to meet in order to achieve optimal physical, mental, and emotional development and adaptability*. Liedloff suggests that *when certain evolutionary expectations are not met as infants and toddlers, compensation for these needs will be sought, by alternate means, throughout life—resulting in many forms of mental and social disorders*. She also argues that these expectations are largely distorted or neglected in civilized cultures, which have removed themselves from the natural evolutionary process.

Liedloff's concept fits in more generally into evolutionary psychology and the philosophy known as the [Paleolithic lifestyle](#).^{xiv} optimizing well-being by living more like our hunter-gatherer ancestors, who Liedloff refers to as "evolved" humans, since their lifestyle developed through natural selection by living in the wild. Frankly speaking: I am not attracted by the Paleolithic lifestyle and I am to a certain degree amused by people who try to implement this form of life in our current societies. Listen out there: if you watched [Caveman](#) and thought: "That's the life I want to be living!" Let me tell you: Caveman was an entertaining comedy, nothing more. Watch Alejandro G. Iñárritu's recent blockbuster [The Revenant](#) and you get a quite authentic taste what it means to live in the wild amongst the wild.

I am convinced though that we must learn from our ancestors and rebalance our lives. Work less and play more. Work less, but with increased productivity – isn't that what the economy wants from us? To make this happen we actually have to learn from our hunter & gatherer ancestors, because they were master trained zero procrastinators and worked only about 6 hours a day. Their cruel teacher was evolution and they paid with their life for failure. I don't recommend that we enter a new era of biological Darwinism, but I recommend looking into techniques which help us to grow habits of zero procrastination.^{xv} A good example are free solo climbers, who must establish a routine of properly making one solid step after another. No procrastination possible at El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. Start mountaineering Tim, believe me, and you will cut your inclination to procrastinate fast.

05 The Manual Labor Theory

Urban provides a third explanation model for the appearance of procrastination himself.^{xvi} He mentions that in particular PhD students replied to his blog on procrastination and expressed their anxiety over being constantly mulled into the dark playground by their instant gratification monkey. I believe that their dissatisfaction with

their performance is only to a certain degree related to procrastination in the narrow sense, i.e. individual failure. I would like to argue that we live as society in an already much too scientific world, which puts many people who are not meant to spend almost half their life with books and research into life styles which cause them to be unhappy and eventually to compensate by hanging around in the dark playground with a burn out. Modern industrial innovation societies, so called knowledge economies, reduce the overlap between easy and fun and makes sense.

The question is therefore not so much how we can move ourselves into the make-sense work space,^{xvii} but how to enlarge the overlap of make-sense and easy-and-fun. Why don't we try to balance e.g. our mental work more with make-sense manual work and of course also the other way around? I find it personally most refreshing to fix something broken in our house, sort screws or put up a shelf after reading six hours Barrington Moore's [The Social Origins of Democracy and Fascism](#). Brilliant book by the way. It's both easy-and-fun and makes-sense. Not reading the book but putting up a shelf or sorting screws. Both reading Barrington Moore and putting up a shelf makes sense and vault me into workflow mode. And whenever I have finished sorting screws, I have the feeling, that I can sort my ideas more clearly and understand prodigies like Moore better.

I therefore suggest that the dark playground is somehow linked with our pejorative view of manual labor and our overvaluation of academic credentials. Don't take a PhD for the sake of moving up the social hierarchy. Do it only if you are really into your research topic and if your work somehow contributes to society at large – and if you enjoy sorting screws once in a while. Moreover, some people might have things to say, but the constricted academic analysis is not their natural way of expressing themselves. Urban is the best example: He is a motherfucking great blogger and speaker, but he would not be able to express his thoughts likewise in academic ruminations. He would simply not enjoy himself doing it. I admit, me neither.

So, let's be realistic: society pushes us into the rational decision maker workspace and makes this area, which Freud would have called the *Über-Ich* or Super-Ego ever larger. But Urban himself – and God, am I happy for him – found an almost perfect overlap between playground and workspace. I call this the *enlightened playground*. I am quite sure that others can follow Urban's example; and yes, some manual labor might help.

I want to mention here a useful concept, which creativity teacher [Julia Cameron](#) calls filling-the-well and which has a proven track record of enlarging the enlightened playground. Filling-the-well is conscious quality time with our own inner child, which we have neglected in our puritan hard-working lifestyle since the Neolithic revolution. It's a deliberate and well-planned visit of a natural science museum, baking your own bread, a bike trip around the island of Taiwan, growing your own tomatoes, a stroll into the architectural history of your neighborhood, joining a pottery class or watching a movie

which you had for years on your bucket list. I read about Julia Cameron's filling-the-well concept the first time 15 years ago in her book [The Artist's Way](#), a twelve-week course for recovering one's creativity. She happens to have recently published sort of a [sequel](#) for mid aged people looking into unlocking their potential or simply trying to take the proper next step in a period of transition, e.g. out of your job into retirement.¹²

06 Procrastination and Sloth

I started off with comparing procrastination to sloth. I want to elaborate on this comparison, because like Urban's TED talk it was oversimplified. Evolutionary biologists^{xviii} tell us that the genus *homo* exists for about 2.5 million years and is different from the genus *pan*. Some don't agree and throw *homo* and *pan* into one pot. I tend to agree with the latter, because although evolution can be analytically categorized into myriads of *genii*, we shall not forget that it's all just one incredibly long and intrinsically linked process of the same components, mostly helium and nitrogen. Physicists would argue though for matter and energy; theologians would add spirit; transpersonal psychologist consciousness. The question that strikes me is, where we draw the subtle line, if we were to draw one, between animal kingdom and man or between primates and *homo sapiens*. I have a hunch that procrastination can give us an answer.

Until Darwin's publication of [Origin of Species](#)^{xix} the Western world believed that man is entirely different from animal; modern man dropped this understanding and defines man as being an integral part of the animal kingdom. Interestingly animistic native cultures and modern scientific cultures find in this understanding a common denominator. I consider myself to be an avid follower of Darwin's evolutionary theory, because - without going into any further detail - it feels right. But there is one aspect about man which separates him nevertheless from all other living things: conscious choice.

If we think Jean Liedloff's continuum concept to the very end, it implies that our foraging ancestors lived like all animals with zero procrastination. Evolution did not give them a choice. Put off the next proper step and you are gone. I therefore believe that choice and discretion did only appear as a mass phenomenon during the Neolithic revolution, i.e. when our societies turned into what we would call nowadays affluent. Interestingly it is

¹² [Forbes](#) recently published a good summary of the main four tools recommended by Julia Cameron to recover creativity:

1. Morning Pages: three handwritten, stream of consciousness pages, written first thing every morning for 12 weeks
2. Solo Walks: twice weekly 20 minute strolls in solitude
3. Artist Dates: once weekly appointment with your inner child
4. Memoir Writing: divide your age by 12 and write for 12 weeks on a weekly basis about the respective fraction

also during the Neolithic revolution that Semitic religions appear and with them clearly verbalized guidelines - like the Ten Commandments - of what to do and what not to do. It seems to me that religious evolution itself pivots around choice, in particular if we compare animistic forms of faith, which dominated until the Neolithic revolution and Semitic religions which dominated thereafter. Economic wealth or abundance in natural resources enabled man to choose between industry and sloth, between survival and waste.¹³¹⁴

07 Procrastination and the Cognitive Revolution

But is the Neolithic revolution really the evolutionary milestone to which we can attach the appearance of choice? Rather not. Wealth and the storage of wealth, originally in form of crops, did enable man to split from evolution, to change his habits for the good or bad, but from a biological perspective he was capable to choose much earlier. Interestingly, paleontologist¹⁵ differentiate between two forms of *homo sapiens*. Early *homo sapiens* appeared around 200.000 years ago; modern *homo sapiens*, who was biologically what we are today, around 70.000 years ago. The appearance of modern *homo sapiens* seems to coincide with the cognitive revolution. At least that's what I suggest. There are specialists like [Spencer Wells](#) or [Daniel Levitin](#) to figure out the details.

The cognitive revolution is described by two features: man was able to describe abstract matter and the non-existent. It is nevertheless to my knowledge neither linked to modern *homo sapiens* nor to choice. Quite on the contrary, evolutionary biologists claim that modern *homo sapiens* evolved about 50.000 years ago, i.e. 20.000 years after the cognitive revolution. Well, the cognitive revolution did surely not happen from one day to the other, but rather over the course of many thousand years. There are many follow up questions though which arise from this assumption. Did *homo neanderthalensis* partake in the cognitive revolution? How did the cognitive revolution happen? By what was it caused? Where to draw the line between early and modern *homo sapiens*? And why did cavemen create 18000 BC art^{xx} like the breathtaking paintings in the Lascaux Cave in Southern France? And above all could it be that some so-called revolutions happen simultaneously, I mean a bit happening in a few individuals here and something more in another few individuals there? We are after all even today not at the same level of consciousness.

¹³ How ironic that it is exactly the industrial revolution which propels man back into sloth. See chapter 18.

¹⁴ Compare Karl Jasper's concept of the axial age.

¹⁵ Paleontologists are scientists who study everything before the Neolithic revolution, i.e. things which are older than 12000 years.

08 Carpe Diem!

I believe that an analytical approach will not enable us to answer these questions. No more neurological studies to be done on Neanderthal brains, right? We rather have to combine analytical insights with a longitudinal¹⁶ and integral¹⁷ perspective. And doing this, I come to the conclusion that Tim Urban's metaphor is flawed. With the pejorative usage of the instant gratification monkey he puts the entire animal kingdom in the non-sense corner, and the rational decision maker, i.e. man only, into the make-sense corner.

Such a division clearly implies that man stands above and is separate from all other animals; and consequentially Urban reflects by using this tempting metaphor that he is still caught up in traditional Christian-Judeo concepts of separating body and mind or spirit into evil and sacred. But let's be also honest about this: his talk was fun to watch, and my writing is probably dead boring. And last but not least we come to the same conclusion: make most out of your days.

It will help though to properly understand, how we can make most of our days. The separation of body and mind leads us directly into one of the most fundamental psychological discussions about monism and dualism.^{XXI} But again, I don't want to go into details. It's enough to say that both points of view are both right and wrong. Body and mind are separate and one at the same time. Modern transpersonal respectively integral psychology would argue that man is not separate from the animal kingdom and that the animal kingdom is indeed part of creation at large. Such a point of view is by some called universal consciousness by others drug abuse.

But what does this mean for Urban's Venn diagram?^{XXII} Assuming that man and his fellow animal *genii* were forced by evolution to zero procrastinate and that procrastination did only appear with the cognitive revolution; assuming moreover, that the wealth acquired since the Neolithic revolution has given man the choice to procrastinate and separate from evolution ever more so, it seems to me that it is rather appropriate to choose the monkey as metaphor for the rational decision maker and *homo sapiens* as monkey. At least as long as *homo sapiens* continues to procrastinate.

09 Homo Illumens and the Enlightened Playground

¹⁶ A longitudinal perspective tries to incorporate the entire existence of a certain phenomenon as opposed to a punctual perspective, e.g. we do not only look at the diet change of the human species during the first industrial revolution, but during its entire existence since some 200.000 years ago till the present day; see also Stephen Johnson: Where do Good Ideas Come from?

¹⁷ An integral perspective is in line with transpersonal or integral psychology, which claims the interconnectedness of everything.

If we take the approach of growth towards our fullest potential like [Abraham Maslow](#) or [Alexander Lowen](#) postulated in their teachings of positive psychology and bioenergetic psychotherapy respectively, a complete overlap of body and mind, of fun & easy and make sense would eventually result in an enlightened playground only;^{xxiii} a playground for the *homo illumens*, the enlightened man, as opposed to *homo sapiens*, who does only possess the anatomical features to become enlightened, but has not yet mastered this last leap in the evolutionary process of our species.¹⁸

From a religious point of view such an understanding does make sense.^{xxiv} The one or other biblical fable pivots around the concept of man being cast out of paradise, being separated from God. The Christian-Judeo tradition thus conditioned our thinking for the last three millennia that paradise is separate from our mundane existence. That is probably the worst lie ever instilled into mankind at large. Semitic religions made us believe that it was our sinful behavior, i.e. biting into the apple of knowledge, which made the old man kick our ass. Modern, post-religious man is – like Tim Urban – still unconsciously in the grip of this dogma. But from an evolutionary point of view, the bite into the bespoken piece of fruit was rather not our choice, but the result of a physiological and cultural evolution. We must therefore not blame ourselves for an ever growing frontal lobe and a cultural heritage which is in denial of its physical reality.¹⁹

Interestingly, most non Semitic traditions never did so,^{xxv} in particular the Far East Asian civilizations are completely devoid of such concepts. One could now go into ontological depths and ponder whether the Western tendency towards analytical thinking was causal to its religious understanding or the other way round; and if Far Eastern synthetic thinking came first or its Taoist and Shinto forms of faith. But let's leave this question to neurologists and theologians respectively and let's dwell on Harvard Psychologist [Stephen Pinker](#)'s research. He claimed 1994 that language is a human instinct, wired into our brains by evolution like web-spinning in spiders or sonar in bats. The theory provides a whole new vision of the human mind: it is not a general-purpose computer, but a collection of instincts adapted to solving evolutionarily significant problems.

If Pinker is right, and his elaborate research does not really leave any doubt, then our brain is a tool to solve the problems evolution brings about. Evolution is not infallible. In a fairly simplistic explanation this implies that evolution, God, the Great Spirit, ZZ Top or however you want to call it, bestowed upon us the anatomical features to solve problems, but it's up to us whether we make use of this capacity or not. *Homo illumens* is therefore a *homo sapiens* who puts his brains and limbs in the service of evolution, i.e. making this

¹⁸ compare the [Fermi Paradox](#): could this be the great filter?

¹⁹ Compare to Rudolf Steiner, who believed that man had to explore the material world first, in order to understand the spiritual realm – like a pendulum of consciousness.

world a better place, that is in the last extent: paradise. [Leo Tolstoy](#) once put it like this: *It is within my power either to serve God or not to serve him. Serving him, I add to my own good and the good of the whole world. Not serving him, I forfeit my own good and deprive the world of that good, which was in my power to create.*

10 Establishing a Habit of Purposefulness

Film director Werner Herzog asks in his 2007 documentary^{xxvi} [Encounters at the End of the World](#) a penguin expert biologist, whether he has ever noticed mental disease or psychological disorder in penguin individuals. The biologist, himself living the life of a researcher-hermit and having difficulties to engage in a sound conversation, tells Herzog that occasionally individual penguins wander off; they leave the flock and head out into Antarctica into secure death. I doubt that such behavior is choice. Its either a physiological malfunction or God's call to spend 40 days starving in a frozen desert to receive the inspiration for a Penguin Bible.

The hugely successful business book^{xxvii} [Our Iceberg is Melting](#) by John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber picks up the penguin metaphor to teach eight steps of change management in organizations. Step 8 tells us to create a new culture: *Establish new rules and ways of living. Make sure they are successful, until they become strong enough to stand on their own.* Our Iceberg is literally melting. But not only this. Mankind faces within the next two or three decades many complex challenges like overpopulation and scarcity of resources or artificial intelligence and an imminent change of our concept of labor. **How can we create a culture which reduces procrastination and enlarges the enlightened playground, i.e. let more people have more fun in doing what makes sense?**

I want to propose here a simple^{xxviii} traffic light which we are asked to contemplate in our mind before making a choice. It encompasses the psychological schools developed by [Sigmund Freud](#), [Alfred Adler](#) and [Viktor Frankl](#) and as such three divergent neurological theories of 19th and 20th century motivational experts: Do I take or do I neglect to take a step because of pleasure, power and/or purpose?²⁰

If we can grow an individual habit to walk mostly at green, we can grow a purposeful culture at large, one that e.g. does not fight over a bunch of rocks in the South China Sea with assumed fossil resources beneath, but thinks about how the exploitation of these

²⁰ Compare John Frankenheimers 1966 film Seconds, which shows the life of a completely alienated banker who engages an agency to change his identity into a pleasant life, as Seligman would call it, or a life motivated by pleasure only, as Freud would have said. The problem is that he does not change his dream, but only his existence. What we really ought to do, is change our dreams towards a purposeful existence.

resources can best contribute to regional stability and environmental protection. We are not to be blamed for the cognitive revolution, but we are as individuals, organizations and national entities to be blamed for not putting our anatomical assets into the service of evolution – which also includes our children. Man has the conscious, individual and collective choice of acting in tune with God or in his own short-sighted interest.²¹

11 Belphegor: Instant Gratification Monkey's Best Pal

The Italian poet [Dante Alighieri](#)^{XXIX} wrote in the early 14th century, most likely in Bologna, [Commedia](#), the Divine Comedy, which is divided into three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. On the surface, the poem describes Dante's travels through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven; but at a deeper level it is an allegory of the soul's journey towards God. The core seven sins within Purgatory²² correspond to a moral scheme of love perverted, subdivided into three groups corresponding to excessive love ([Lust](#), [Gluttony](#), [Greed](#)), deficient love ([Sloth](#)), and malicious love ([Wrath](#), [Envy](#), [Pride](#)). Almost 700 years later, social philosopher [Erich Fromm](#) writes [The Art of Loving](#), not a bit poem, but pure non-fiction; yet Dante and Fromm meet somewhere halfway between fiction and non-fiction in their analysis of how man is supposed to interact with himself, others and God.

Etymologically speaking, the English word sin is derived from Latin *siscere*, which means to cut off, indicating its original meaning of being cut off from God. Whether we call it wickedness, crime, offence, misdeed, lapse, fall from grace, trespass, unrighteousness, immorality, profanity, blasphemy, impiety, impiousness, sacrilege or vice, it strikes me as interesting that Dante erects the Wall of Dis to separate his 30 something list of wrongdoings into active and passive ones. Procrastination, it seems, is nothing more than new speak for a passive sin, that is according to Dante: sloth.

The German 16th century Theologian [Peter Binsfeld](#) is credited with a classification of demons in which he attributes [Belphegor](#) to sloth. Belphegor, I have to admit,^{XXX} looks quite a bit scarier than the instant gratification monkey. Sin does also sound less comforting than procrastination. Both characters contain though the same misunderstanding: that the individual is to be blamed only for whatever human shortcoming is associated with procrastination or sloth. Looking at this phenomenon again with an osmotic perspective there are always exogenous factors like hereditary patterns of behavior, which some call generational or cultural karma. The Swiss psychoanalyst [Carl G. Jung](#) proposed that we have to rid ourselves from these exogenous factors through [individuation](#).

²¹ Nobody explains the responsibility mankind faces at this crucial junction in our evolution better than paleontologist [Kenneth Lacovara](#).

²² Is it in purgatorio or inferno? TBC

Power elites now and then know how they put religious doctrines to their use. The mantra “only who works hard succeeds” is still deeply woven into our heads. Industry was put in particular in Protestant and Confucian dogmas at the top of man’s virtues. Slavery, serfdom and exploitation were justified by clergy and statesmen in the name of God’s and the Emperor’s will. Our foraging ancestors worked only six hours daily,²³ but were most certainly permanently in the enlightened playground. Whatever wealth there was, it was fairly evenly distributed. Our modern societies though prevent since the Neolithic revolution social mobility by means of inheritance, low real estate taxation²⁴ and social status.

Man is not made for industrial work shifts. He needs time off, time to envision his future and to individuate. Those who are in the treadmill, whether it is active plight or passive consumerism, fail to think and listen to the source within. It comes then as quite a surprise that Belphegor disguises himself with the advent of the industrial revolution in the coat of industry. The yoke of manual labor is taken from both man and beast, mechanical and electrical appliances drag us gradually into habitual passiveness, which reaches its current climax with industrial revolution 4.0, i.e. the internet of things (IOT) and cyber physical systems (CPS).^{xxxI} We are glued behind our screens, whether TV, personal computer or smart phone, dragged into a virtual reality, which does not require us anymore to substantially interact with real people. We nevertheless are busier than ever and ever more mindless.

Science fiction movies like *Surrogates*²⁵ or *Wall-E*²⁶, where man lives in a world of almost no real physical interaction, portray dystopian scenarios which are not too far fetched from the current state of urban centers in advanced societies. Our neurological gratification centers are goaded into ever more self-stimulation. We establish habits of getting a quick fix similar to drug addicts. A burger here instead of cooking a healthy meal yourself. Some masturbation there instead of loving a real person. A computer game with an anonymous online community instead of play with actual friends. Neurology has confirmed that all these activities stimulate the same brain region. Drug and game addicts are from a neurologically perspective obese; engrossed with Belphegor and ignorant to our very neighbor.²⁷ As we slip into the virtual world we are ever more at risk to loose ourselves and establish habits of mindlessness.

²³ Compare Stefan Sagmeister: [The Power of Time Off](#)

²⁴ compare with [Georgism](#), an economic theory which economic value derived from land, including natural resources and natural opportunities, should belong equally to all residents of a community, but that people should own the value that they produce themselves.

²⁵ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0986263/>

²⁶ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0910970/?ref=nm_sr_5

²⁷ Compare [Second Great Commandment](#): "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

12 Procrastination and Ignorance

Laziness, inactivity, inertia, sluggishness, passivity, lethargy, languor, torpidity, slowness, heaviness, dullness, shiftlessness. Synonyms for^{xxxii} sloth; a word which is a translation of the Latin term *acedia* and means "without care". Spiritually, *acedia* first referred to an affliction attending religious persons, especially monks, wherein they became indifferent to their duties and obligations to God. Mentally, *acedia* is a lack of any feeling about self or other, a mind-state that gives rise to boredom, rancor, apathy, and a passive inert or sluggish mentation. Physically, *acedia* is fundamentally associated with a cessation of motion and an indifference to work; it finds expression in laziness, idleness, and indolence.

Unlike the other capital sins, which are sins of committing immorality, sloth is a sin of omitting responsibilities. In his *Summa Theologica*, Saint Thomas Aquinas²⁸ defined sloth as "sorrow about spiritual good" and as "sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good... [it] is evil in its effect, if it so oppresses man as to draw him away entirely from good deeds." By this definition, evil exists when "good" people fail to act. *Acedia* takes form as an alienation of the sentient self, first from the world and then from itself. Erich Fromm would have agreed with Thomas Aquinas, George B. Shaw, too.

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.
[George B. Shaw]

Sociologist Stanford M. Lyman²⁹ describes sloth as languishing and holding back, refusing to undertake works of goodness, because the respective circumstances are too difficult to suffer. *Acedia* in this view is thus the enemy of every source and motive for work. *Sloth slows down the mind, halting its attention to matters of great importance. Acedia was fostered by a religious mindset which made people believe that everything that needs to be known is written in holy scriptures; by putting those who went beyond religious hierarchies to the torture of inquisition and burning them at the stake. Admitting ignorance on the other hand propelled mankind into the scientific revolution and was the foundation for our contemporary world.*³⁰

14 Procrastination and Depression

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Aquinas

²⁹ https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/484721.The_Seven_Deadly_Sins

³⁰ Sapiens by Yuval N. Harari, Chapter 14: The Discovery of Ignorance

The difference which I read from the descriptions of procrastination and sloth is the physical aspect. Procrastination does in our understanding not come with a pathological physical component. It's still there, but our cultural programming makes it difficult to see. As procrastination, sloth and mindlessness, the antonym of the currently much en vogue mindfulness movement, converge in their meaning a fourth also rather recent mass phenomenon emerges as common denominator:^{xxxiii} depression.³¹

Martin E. Seligman³², by some called the modern father of positive psychology, wrote in his 1990 publication *Learned Optimism* that *most of the developed world experiences an unprecedented epidemic of depression – particularly among young people. Why is that in a nation that has more money, more power, more records, more books, and more education, that depression should be so much more prevalent than it was when the nation was less prosperous and less powerful?* He elaborates that three forces have converged: An inflated “I” failing in its own eyes relative to its goals; an erosion of the “WE”, i.e. faith in God, community, nation, and the large extended family give way to the I; and the self-esteem movement. 16th century theologian Peter Binsfeld would have said that Belphegor deceived man into sloth by offering him the exuberant convenience of modern technology.

Seligman is an expert on depression respectively optimism and has authored other important books like *The Optimistic Child*. He is an advocate of instilling optimism into children before puberty and is well aware that negative thinking habits take time to be substituted with new positive ones. His research and his therapeutic practice have led him to the conclusion that changing a pessimistic or even depressive mind by means of [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT)³³ towards positive thinking amplifies positive emotions and therefore opens up a conscious choice^{xxxiv} between

- *a pleasant life, i.e. you aim to have as much positive emotion as possible.*
- *an engaged life, i.e. you identify your highest strengths and talents and recraft your life to use them as much as you can in work, love, friendship, parenting, and leisure.*
- *a meaningful life, i.e. you use your highest strengths and talents to belong to and serve something you believe is larger than the self.*

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/mar/14/truth-about-depression>

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Seligman

³³ Positive psychology has established CBT as the centerpiece remedy to get seriously depressive or pessimistic people out of their accustomed mindset. CBT is a psychosocial intervention that is the most widely used evidence-based practice for treating mental disorders. CBT focuses on the development of personal coping strategies that target solving current problems and changing unhelpful patterns in cognitions (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes), behaviors, and emotional regulation. It was originally designed to treat depression, and is now used for a number of mental health conditions.

15 Procrastination and the Body³⁴

*Any good philosophy must start out with the recognition of our having a body man is made of flesh and spirit both, and it should be philosophy's business to see that the mind and body live harmoniously together, that there be a reconciliation between the two.*³⁵

I was surprised though that he recommends CBT only. Seligman seems to clearly understand the correlation between a changing society and increased negativity. He writes that *a pessimistic attitude may seem so deeply rooted as to be permanent*, however, he has found, *that pessimism is escapable*. This sounds to a certain extent like Buddha's teachings, that within all the turmoil and pandemonium which surrounds us, we can still find enlightenment. I don't object. I do agree. Look inside for salvation. CBT could be understood as modern terminology for the Eightfold Path. But throughout Seligman's book I kept thinking: don't I turn into a sort of brainwashed fellow looking at the world through pink spectacles. Sure, all his findings about learned helplessness and the explanatory style, i.e. how we explain success or failure to ourselves, make perfectly sense. If I create a habit of explaining failure as non permanent and not self inflicted, I establish resilience and perhaps even grit. But sociological phenomena remain as they are; and I can only hope that my naïve positive outlook is seriously contagious. Studies show nevertheless that the Gini coefficient grows and social mobility is reduced in advanced industrial nations. Where is the problem? Are all those people at the increasingly thick bottom of our societies pessimists? Rather not.³⁶

Seligman, provides like many other Western psychologists before him, a dualist solution, to an essentially monist problem: alienation from ourselves and evolution must be reversed through the mind and the body. CBT^{xxxv} is a very important and valid strategy to rectify the mind. But the mind alone can't change the body. It was the controversial psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich who first recognized amongst Western physicians the insufficiency of treating people's mind only and who broke the taboo of physical interaction between therapist and client. He recognized that all psychological states have a somatic reflection in our system and coined the term muscle armor for chronic tensions caused by psychopathological conditions. One of his long term students, the US American Alexander Lowen, developed on the basis of Freud's and Reich's teachings bioenergetics, a therapy which focuses on the body as main storage of emotional information.³⁷

³⁴ Considerations on the human neurological biochemistry are to be found in chapter 18

³⁵ Lin Yutang, The Importance of Living, Earthbound

³⁶ Until I have been convinced that our lives are just one grand stage on which we try to grow towards enlightenment, I believe that both inner revolt and outer revolution are required to bring about changes for the better. CBT is therefore nothing more than a tool to bring about inner changes. For outer changes of our societies inequalities I go with people like [Barbara Ehrenreich](#), who believe in the necessity to not only change ourselves, but also our environments.

³⁷ Alexander Lowen, Bioenergetik

Bioenergetic theory is based on the premise that there is no fundamental separation between the mind and the body; that psychological states reflect and create what is happening physically, and somatic events both reflect and create mental and emotional states. Emotional stress from many areas (relationships, family crisis, jobs, health, etc.) produce tension in the body. Contractions in the muscular system are often the result of carrying unresolved emotional tension. These contractions can have a direct effect on the energy level of the individual, on the capacity for spontaneous and creative self-expression, and on feelings of well-being.

Bioenergetics is credited with having similar self-centering effects like the Eastern physical practices of yoga, taichi or qigong.

The Eckhart Tolle calls Reich's muscle armor pain-body and muses genuinely about its collective aspects: *In countries where the pain-body is heavy but no longer acute, there has been a tendency for people to try and desensitize themselves to the collective emotional pain: in Germany and Japan through work, in some other countries through widespread indulgence in alcohol. China's heavy pain-body is to some extent mitigated by the widespread practice of taichi, which amazingly was not declared illegal by the Communist government that otherwise feels threatened by anything it cannot control. Every day in the streets and parks, millions practice this movement meditation that stills the mind. This makes a considerable difference to the collective energy field and goes some way toward diminishing the pain-body by reducing thinking and generating presence. Spiritual practices that involve the physical body, such as taichi, qigong, and yoga, are also increasingly being embraced in the Western world. These practices do not create a separation between body and spirit and are helpful in weakening the pain-body. They will play an important role in the global awakening.*³⁸

I therefore propose as a solution to procrastination, mindlessness and depression in addition to CBT^{xxxvi} Alexander Lowen's bioenergetics, a therapy which offers a monistic solution to the dualism of mind and body. Lowen wrote *that happiness is the consciousness of growth ... One can only grow in the present, if the past is made alive. If the past is cut off from the present, there can't be any future ... a man is the sum of his life's experiences, which form his personality and are built into his body.* Not everyone might need a therapy, but statistics indicate that more and more people are unhappy.³⁹ Procrastination is only one symptom of many. And as long as we haven't built a new culture, i.e. habits of leading more satisfying and richer lives, we might have to acknowledge that the right therapy is just about as much as we can do to cure if not our societies at large then at least ourselves to construct a somewhat better environment for our descendants.

³⁸ Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth

³⁹ see e.g. Martin Seligman, Learned Optimism

16 Procrastination and Faith

Some form of constructive faith will help or as Seligman put it: *With a firm belief in a positive future you can throw yourself into the service of that which is larger than you are.*^{xxxvii} It has though become deeply unpopular to speak in a scientific era of God; and until recently I would have been most likely the first to roll my eyes in contempt and walk away if somebody would start to talk about God or other esoteric, non-scientific concepts. But how much easier would life be, if we learn again to trust in some guiding form of consciousness or *mind at large* as [Aldous Huxely](#) called it, which above all wants things to run smoothly and better than they did hitherto? Not in order to idly waste our days, but in order to have in an increasingly complex world the faith to walk long distances without any reward. Tom Kimber, a friend from my time in Kunming, once called this form of faith an *eternal mindset*: the ability to not look for instant gratification, but be in tune with the big picture and the large goals of creation. I never really understood what he meant by that, but the eternal mindset stayed with me like some poetic truth, which I only comprehend now by dissecting procrastination.

The Israeli historian and atheist Harari writes that *the willingness to admit ignorance has made modern science more dynamic, supple and inquisitive than any previous tradition of knowledge. But it presents us with a serious problem that most of our ancestors did not have to cope with. Our current assumption that we do not know everything, and that even the knowledge we possess is tentative, extends to the shared myths that enable millions of strangers to cooperate effectively. If the evidence shows that many of those myths [i.e. religion, money, nation] are doubtful, how can we hold society together? How can our communities, countries and the international system function?*²⁴⁰

The resulting and somewhat pending collective procrastination due to dysfunctional organizational systems which are deprived from their uniting myths is already fairly apparent in advanced post modern democracies.⁴¹ Henry Kissinger writes that national states as smallest units of the international system are being dissolved by supranational organizations like the EU or ASEAN;⁴² traditional currencies sabotaged by virtual money like bitcoin; religious organizations substituted by local communities like the [school of life](#).

⁴⁰ See *Sapiens* by Yuval N. Harari, Chapter 14: The Discovery of Ignorance

⁴¹ [I recall](#) last summer spending a week in my native hometown, where citizens complained about a daily traffic collapse, which caused considerable economic damage to the region. The reason for the chaos is to be explained with both collective and individual procrastination. Road management in the city is split between several levels of administration, since some roads are under federal, some under provincial and some under municipal authority. Four out of five bridges crossing the Danube river were either not yet completed, under renovation or under de-construction, because the respective federal, provincial and municipal government officials failed to agree on or even plan a regional traffic strategy.

⁴² See *World Order* by Henry Kissinger

Nevertheless, one could object that some of the brightest minds on this planet call themselves atheists and don't suffer from individual procrastination. Why is that? Prodigy Viktor Frankl would have answered with a book titled [The Unconscious God](#), which he submitted as dissertation to obtain his second PhD in philosophy: not everybody needs to be conscious of God, but it helps in particular in situations of doubt and indecisiveness. Like committing oneself to change a habit of thought through cognitive behavioral therapy, a habit of motion or lack of motion through bioenergetics, human faithfulness is a deeply individual decision, not everyone is ready for.⁴³ For those who feel that procrastination - in the one or other form - causes suffering beyond measure, trying will pay off. God wants to bless and increase us, but we then have to be prepared to move and take steps he tells us to.

The enlightened playground opens up if we let go of our wanting and submit ourselves to God's will.^{xxxviii} To make sure that we don't listen to some persistent neurotic voice in our heads, it makes sense to first calm our minds with meditation, practice taichi, perform routine manual work and establish moreover a positive outlook with e.g. [neurolinguistic programming](#)⁴⁴. But above all we need to comprehend that in Buddhist teachings pain and suffering are qualitatively distinct, and one does not necessarily follow the other. The origin of this insight is the practice of letting go. *In the words of Sengcan, the Third Patriarch of Zen, "The Great Way is without difficulty, just cease having preferences." When the mind becomes so free that it is capable of letting go even of preferences, the Great Way is no longer difficult.*⁴⁵

Any form of ego attachment is in the last extent a form of not letting go and thus effectively failing to tune into God's will. Body and mind become one when they are infused with spirit; this is called atonement with God's will and has been the common denominator of many religious teachings. As long as modern man and his inflated ego rejects evolution's guidance all his trying to find salvation, satisfaction or happiness will not succeed. I have therefore resolved to add to a positive mental outlook physical exercises, a healthy diet and a daily prayer as a positive stream of consciousness or an additional layer of CBT if you want so, to open myself to God's guidance.

The German term *Seelsorge* for pastoral care catches the essence of what men (and women) of faith ought to do: caring for the souls of their flock of people. But how can pastoral care fulfill such a purpose, if it is ignorant to the realm of the body? A monistic form of pastoral care must include latest scientific knowledge from neurology, psychiatry and positive psychology and a good amount of Asian atonement exercises. Why? Because

⁴³ see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

⁴⁴ Neurolinguistic Programming or short NLP is a psychotherapeutic technique which is very similar to CBT, but has never gained the same level of recognition amongst experts.

⁴⁵ Compare Chade Meng-Tan, *Search Inside Yourself*

the man who does not pray and is without faith, but has a healthy body-mind equilibrium, is enlightened. The man who does pray, but is without a body-mind equilibrium is in the dark playground.⁴⁶

17 Procrastination and Intuition^{XXXIX}

I have recently tried to explain to a few friends this triadic approach of body, mind and soul and there was recurring confusion about the concept of soul. I believe to understand why. Whereas body and mind stay with us in almost permanence from cradle to grave – that is apart from sleep and serious intoxication - the soul is usually an evasive and ghostly companion. Changes to the substance of body and mind do mostly happen in a recognizable way – if we can't make sense of such changes we suffer psychological or physiological traumata. Try to cut off one of your limbs with a chain saw or have a taste of Alzheimer and be incapable to find your own home.⁴⁷ Our connection with our soul though seems to be a permanent trauma; this trauma is the crisis of modern man since the start of the scientific revolution. How to make sense of something that can't be understood nor measured?^{XL}

The Indian-American philosopher [Jiddu Krishnamurti](#) is credited with saying *intuition is the whisperer of the soul*. If the body is the temple of the soul, but not equal to the soul, and if a disruption of the human development continuum as described by Jean Liedloff disrupts the body – mind equilibrium, then it is a natural consequence that we cease to hear the voice of our soul i.e. intuition. Just think of an opera house after an earthquake. The audio experience won't be hi-fi. What happens is that we compensate the lack of intuitive mind with our rational mind, and slowly but surely turn into pessimistic or even depressed human beings – even if we are blessed with a sound biochemistry - because we have lost our inner compass which shows us a meaningful and connected life. Anxiety pushes us either to turn obey to totalitarian governments⁴⁸ or to build a new virtual temple and listen to its artificial sound of snotty TV soaps, bloody computer games, and the gossip of social media. Designer [Tristan Harris](#) recently called smart mobile phones, on which we can indulge nowadays in all this cacophony, slump machines: we are addicted to check yet for another message, tweet or like to keep up the illusion of being connected. But actually we are not, because our temple is broken and intuition can only be heard when we are able to listen to the whisperer from within.

⁴⁶ I had an interesting conversation over a draft of this paper with a Hong Kong pastor. He “confessed” that the issue of work and vocation causes many devote Christians to spill their guts. They do not understand how they have to toil in unloved jobs despite their deep faith in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁷ see [Arno Geiger](#): *Der König in seinem Exil*. A touching book about the last years in the life of the author's father, who suffered and eventually dies from Alzheimer disease.

⁴⁸ Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich described this phenomenon in [Escape from Freedom](#) and [The Mass-Psychology of Fascism](#)

It was man admitting his ignorance who embarked on the scientific revolution. In order to recover intuition, man must admit his ignorance once again. Or in the words of acclaimed writer Pico Iyer: The opposite of knowledge, in other words, isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility.⁴⁹ By depriving ourselves from our 5 dimensional standard perception and listening to silence, we can slowly but surely recover our sense of intuition. This is what the ancient Chinese meant with the proverb 回头是岸: turn inwards for salvation. We shall see though in the following paragraphs that admitting ignorance and wonder is severely hampered by our cultural conditioning.

Certain religious traditions claim that body and mind become one, when they are infused with spirit; that process, i.e. increasing the overlap, is called atonement.^{XLII} The reverse process, i.e. decreasing the overlap, is called in Christian tradition sin, which means as we have seen in chapter 12 to cut oneself off from God. Fuzzy visualizations showing the soul separated from body and mind establish three entities. I believe that such visualizations are utterly wrong.^{XLII} Physics has shown that there is only matter and energy, nothing more. And if we remember Karl Maertin's opening quote that *God bestowed the body upon man as the temple for the soul*, we might understand that the soul is energy which manifests itself in body and mind; i.e. two parts of one physical entity. The more the mind is detached from its body, the less we can experience our soul; the more we suffer from apathy, depression and other mental diseases. It is our inflated minds, our oversized egos which alienate ourselves more and more from the body and therefore make it impossible to listen to the soul's subtle voice: intuition.^{XLIII}

Think of movies like [Surrogates](#), [The Matrix](#) or [Wall-E](#), where exactly such scenarios of a physical degeneration are shown, leaving man out of touch with his body and with an arguably deranged mind. I firmly believe that it's wrong to blame ourselves, i.e. endogenous procrastination, for such a development. Instead we have to look into social conditioning, i.e. exogenous procrastination, in particular into the industrial revolution to understand the underlying cause-effect mechanism.

There is this persistent hunch at the back of my mind that man was in the enlightened playground until the Neolithic or at least until the cognitive revolution.^{XLIV} The cognitive revolution introduced choice and thus the possibility of endogenous procrastination, i.e. man's self will to not act in tune with evolution. The Neolithic revolution started to gradually deprive us from our species-specific lifestyle, which had been developed by evolution over thousands of years. Psychological disorders and exogenous procrastination began to appear. Genuinely endogenous procrastination is in other words the result of biological changes, which took place some 30-70.000 years ago, but exogenous procrastination is the result of cultural changes which started about 12.000

⁴⁹ Watch Pico Iyer's stupendous narrative [here](#)

years ago and continue to take place, accelerated by the industrial revolution and ever increasing virtuality of our lives.

These cultural changes take place on a physical level but show their impact in pathological behavior patterns. It is therefore not surprising that early psychotherapists like Sigmund Freud almost only dealt with neurotic patients, whereas the second half of the 20th and the 21st century see a psychotic epidemic: the further our cultures deprive us from our evolutionary expectations on a physical level, the more severe our psychopathological behavior. The most profound consequence of this gradual physical and mental degradation is that our cultures suffocate the whisperer of our soul: intuition. In such an understanding exogenous procrastination is not self-will against evolution, but a mostly silent cry for salvation.

18 Procrastination and Suicide

>>> In some souls, the discordant note becomes harsher and harsher and finally overwhelms or submerges the main melody. Sometimes the discordant note gains so much power that the music can no longer go on, and the individual shoots himself with a pistol or jumps into a river. But that is because his original leitmotif has been hopelessly over-shadowed through the lack of a good self-education. Otherwise the normal human life runs to its normal end in a kind of dignified movement and procession. There are sometimes in many of us too many staccatos or impetuosos, and because the tempo is wrong, the music is not pleasing to the ear; we might have more of the grand rhythm and majestic tempo of the Ganges, flowing slowly and eternally into the sea.⁵⁰

The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl describes in his concentration camp memoirs *Man's Search for Meaning*⁵¹, how mentally healthy people choose suicide over life when facing the overwhelming cruelty of individual sadism as well as organizational and governmental exploitation. Isn't suicide – although comprehensible in such a situation – the ultimate form of procrastination? And isn't each case of suicide despite the personal tragedy worth a study whether endogenous or exogenous factors were predominant to cause such an act of total procrastination?⁵²

⁵⁰ Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*, Human Live a Poem

⁵¹ see Viktor Frankl: [Man's Search for Meaning](#)

⁵² Some people would argue that suicide is not a form of procrastination but quitting a game which can never be won. I would therefore like to emphasize that procrastination in my understanding always needs to be linked to purpose. Parents, who don't provide their infant child or toddler with love and nurturing to be able to grow into a whole person, procrastinate in fulfilling exactly this purpose. A mother who has grown 80 years old, has raised her child in her best will and ability, but suffers from painful arthritis and decides to make an end to her life before death of natural cause can alleviate her pain, does not procrastinate, but quits; for she has no purpose left and suffers beyond her endurance.

To me such extreme examples do certainly show that language has its limits, because the boundaries between exogenous and endogenous procrastination get blurred: in a concentration camp where sensitive and labile individuals perish first, nobody would stigmatize them mentally insane, but victims of brutal oppression. In societies which enjoy much freedom, we label them as sick. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention states e.g. on its website that *'Ninety percent of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their deaths. There are biological and psychological treatments that can help address the underlying health issues that put people at risk for suicide.'*⁵³ What are these underlying health issues? Are they all of biochemical nature and thus rather endogenous? Or are there cultural conditions and thus exogenous factors which are causal for a majority of suicides?⁵⁴

Harari writes poignantly that *we need to examine mass statistics rather than individual stories in order to understand macro-historical processes.* He continues that in 2002 *'Out of 57 million dead only 172k people died in war and 569k died of violent crime (a total of 741k victims of human violence. In contrast, 873k people committed suicide. It turns out that in the year following the 9/11 attacks, despite all the talk of terrorism and war, the average person was more likely to kill himself than to be killed by a terrorist, a soldier or a drug dealer.'*⁵⁵ We have already seen in chapter 14 that Western nations are subject to epidemic depression;^{XLV} I was thus curious what the data on suicides would reveal; and I was not disappointed in my assumption that the industrialized world experiences a surge in suicides in addition to a decline of violent death. The WHO collected and published suicide data for 2012 and came to a statistical global average suicide rate of 11.4 per 100.000 inhabitants (15.0 for males and 8.0 for females).⁵⁶ The regional average numbers are less interesting, because the number of included countries does distort the reality of national data and causalities which are not related to geography, but rather to socio-economic conditions.

It is at first glance^{XLVI} obvious that increased wealth and increased suicide rates do with a few national exceptions correlate strongly. Industrialized nations suffer in general from higher suicide rates than developing or undeveloped nations. WHO comes nevertheless to a different conclusion: *Suicide does not just occur in high-income countries, but is a global phenomenon in all regions of the world. In fact, 75% of global suicides occurred in low- and middle-income countries in 2012.*⁵⁷ Considering that 75% of global population lives in low income or developing countries, such a statement mounts up to blatant none-

⁵³ <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/preventing-suicide/>

⁵⁴ Compare also with [this article](#) about a physician, who is sentenced to prison and asks the court to be allowed to continue his work in a hospital with foot shackles. He argues that he 'is an emergency surgeon with every fiber of his body. Only when he can work, he can make up for the damage caused.' This case sort of reverses the conditions of a concentration camp.

⁵⁵ see Yuval N. Harari in Sapiens; chapter 18

⁵⁶ http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/

⁵⁷ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs398/en/>

sense, which indicates that there is probably not much awareness at WHO in regard to the correlation of socio-economic conditions and demographics on suicide data.⁵⁸

There^{XLVII} also seems to be a correlation between the pace of industrialization and suicide rates, because Far-east Asian nations like Japan and South Korea which have compressed the industrial revolution into much shorter periods than the West show extraordinary high suicide rates. Without attaching the causality for this data to industrialization only, it seems to be evident that man's alienation from work in the process of labor distribution and the substitution of families and communities by nations and markets is at least partly causal for increased suicide rates and an increase in pathopsychological conditions.⁵⁹ Industrialization would be also a logical explanation for considerable higher male suicide rates⁶⁰ in most countries: men are more directly exposed to changes on the labor market than women, in particular in stereotype family settings, where women stay at home with the children, and men engage in employed serfdom.⁶¹

It would therefore make more sense to group countries according to their socio-economic systems and their general stage of development in regard to industrialization. I didn't run the exact numbers, but a closer look at the WHO data suggests that Western democracies as one group should be compared to Far-east Asian early industrializers, predominantly Muslim countries, and the former Soviet Union with its satellite states. China and India, the two most populous nations, should be considered regions proper and deserve special attention due to their recent pace of socio-economic development.

The worldwide highest suicide rates have been collected for some reason in the Baltic nations, which sit at the border between Russia and Western Europe. Each one of these regions would provide a tremendously interesting socio-psychological research topic, but for the sake of this paper I will confine myself to China and propose that China will within the next two decades most likely go down the same path, South Korea and Japan have taken in regard to suicide statistics during the last years. Anything else would come as a big surprise. But one thing is certain: more qualified data is required to confirm my assumptions.⁶²

Dissecting the causalities of suicide as one of the last stages of mental illness surely requires a few words on our biochemistry. I could have added these considerations

⁵⁸ compare also the [World Mental Health Atlas](#), which does not make the slightest reference to such methods of explaining suicide

⁵⁹ see [Learned Optimism](#) by Martin E. Seligman

⁶⁰ http://www.who.int/gho/mental_health/suicide_rates/en/index1.html

⁶¹ compare the both tragic and smart 2010 movie [Company Men](#)

⁶² The collection of this data and the deduction of related conclusions shall be subject of part 4 of this thesis.

already to chapter 15 on Procrastination and the Body, but it seems to be more appropriate here. Interestingly, I quote no neurologist, but again the historian Harari; because he effectively tried to write with *Sapiens: A History of Humankind* a book about man's pursuit of happiness and life satisfaction:

Social scientists distribute subjective well-being questionnaires and correlate the results with socio-economic factors such as wealth and political freedom. Biologists use the same questionnaires, but correlate the answers people give them with biochemical and genetic factors. Their findings are shocking. Biologists hold that our mental and emotional world is governed by biochemical mechanisms shaped by millions of years of evolution. Like all other mental states, our subjective well-being is not determined by external parameters such as salary, social relations or political rights. Rather, it is determined by a complex system of nerves, neurons, synapses and various biochemical substances such as serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

Harari continues:

Some scholars compare human biochemistry to an air-conditioning system that keeps the temperature constant, come heatwave or snowstorm. Events might momentarily change the temperature, but the air-conditioning system always returns to the same set point. Some air-conditioning systems are set at twenty-five degrees Celsius. Others are set at twenty degrees. Human happiness conditioning systems also differ from person to person. On a scale from one to ten, some people are born with a cheerful biochemical system that allows their mood to swing between levels six and ten, stabilizing with times at eight. Such a person is quite happy even if she lives in an alienating big city, loses all her money in a stock-exchange crash and is diagnosed with diabetes. Other people are cursed with a gloomy biochemistry that swings between three and seven and stabilizes at five. Such an unhappy person remains depressed even if she enjoys the support of a tight-knit community, wins millions in the lottery and is as healthy as an Olympic athlete. Her brain is simply not built for exhilaration, come what may.⁶³

I could not disagree more; only a tiny fraction of homo sapiens suffers from an inherited or genetically programmed AC, which operates at -5 degrees Celsius. The majority is subject to the effects of cultural programming, which – as we shall see – in some instances even has an impact on an individual's biochemistry. Harari's observation is therefore a major understatement of the importance of social science.

Martin Seligman writes that *until recently there were only two accepted ways of thinking about depression: the psychoanalytic and the biomedical*. The psychoanalytic view was based on Freud's assumption that depression was anger turned against the self, i.e. *the*

⁶³ Yuval N. Harari, *Sapiens: A History of Humankind*, chapter 19

depressive disparages himself as worthless and wants to kill himself in the last extent. The biomedical view is held by biological psychiatrists who claim that depression is an illness of the body and comes from an inherited biochemical defect, which is assumed to be located on the arm of chromosome 11 producing an imbalance of brain chemicals.

Psychoanalytic therapy has according to Seligman *not been demonstrated to work for depression*. Drugs and electroconvulsive shocks on the other hand have improved the condition of some patients. Seligman confirms therefore that the biomedical view is partly right but criticizes that it *generalizes from the small number of hard-core, inherited depressions that usually respond to drugs to the much more common, everyday depression that afflict so many lives*.

He continues that *antidepressant drugs are as good an example of our overmedicated society as the use of tranquilizers to bring peace to mind or hallucinogens to see beauty*. In each case, *emotional problems that could be solved by one's own skills and actions are turned over to an outside agent for solution*. Seligman therefore juxtaposes the psychoanalytic and the biochemical view with the cognitive and suggests positive changes in one's thought patterns to resolve depression and ultimately avoid suicide.⁶⁴

Cognitive behavioral therapy is widely considered the most effective remedy against depression, but I strongly believe that it takes more than CBT to counteract an epidemic. I did not agree with Harari's rather biochemical view, neither do I agree with Seligman's cognitive one, but all of them, including Freud's psychoanalytic view do hold a partial truth.

Seligman believes that the large majority of mental disorders can be resolved by one's own skills. Hence, he puts the same pressure upon each person like Tim Urban did after him; as an academic he lacks though Urban's popular eloquence: *They are a huge success in the animal kingdom, but an utter failure as human being*. If I translate Seligman into modern vernacular it would read like this: You can be a huge success on my CBT couch, but otherwise you are an utter failure as a human being.

Now, I am of course being polemic here. Seligman did a great job and created a sophisticated system to identify cognitive behavioral pathologies. But following his historical account of how the cognitive school of psychotherapy evolved since the 60ies, I can't help to recognize this classic pendulum of one extreme view being substituted with its extreme antipode.⁶⁵ The behaviorists under the legendary lead of [Burrhus F. Skinner](#) dominated academia far beyond the field of sociology up till the 1960s and Seligman was

⁶⁴ Martin E. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*, Chapter 1

⁶⁵ *ibid*

one of many young rising academic stars who tried to find a crack in his theory. Seligman elaborates on this clash of perception as such:

The science of psychology has not always cared about individual styles of thinking, or about individual human action or the individual at all. Quite the opposite. [...] The Freudians held that unresolved childhood conflicts drove adult behavior. The followers of B. F. Skinner held that behavior was repeated only when reinforced externally. The ethologists held that behavior resulted from fixed action patterns determined by our genes, and the behaviorist followers of Clark Hull held that we were goaded into action by the need to reduce drives and satisfy biological needs.

Starting around 1965, the favored explanations began to change radically. A person's environment was considered less and less important in causing his behavior. Four different lines of thought converged on the proposition that self-direction, rather than outside forces, could explain human action. [...] So, the dominant theories in psychology shifted focus in the late 1960s from the power of the environment to the individual expectation, preference, choice, decision, control, and helplessness.

What we see here is the academic rebellion of a new generation of scientists against their parent generation. Similar to hippies rejecting the conservative values of their WWII parent generation, the protagonists of the early positive psychology movement did not try to balance their new insights with the work of their behaviorist predecessors, but went for a full swing change of paradigm: a person's environment suddenly was not important at all. Well, as always, the truth must be somewhere in between.

Both Skinner and Seligman do exclude hard-core, inherited biochemical depression from their theory. To create a complete picture of psychopathology, we have to add anatomical defects like a missing or damaged frontal lobe as in the text book case of 19th century railroad construction foreman Phineas Gage; but to be sure, anatomical defects will not be subject of any further discussion in this paper. It is though important to note, that these two categories constitute currently a relatively small fraction of psychopathological conditions in our species.⁶⁶ I believe, however that even the number of inherited neurological malfunction will be reduced in the light of a new understanding of how culture defines neurological biochemistry. The questions, which I therefore want to elaborate on are these: are the reasons for above mentioned procrastination, negativity, apathy, depression and even suicide of endogenous or exogenous nature? Is the individual rather in charge of developing a positive outlook on life or is it rather conditioned by society and culture – lately into a severely mass depressed *modus operandum*?

⁶⁶ Numbers TBC – see part 4

My gut feeling tells me that the latter is true, but in order to not make the same mistake like Seligman and his fellow cognitive psychologists, I do attest the relevance of both schools of thought on the spot. There are two factors which Seligman did not know about, when he initially wrote *Learned Optimism* in 1990. For one he did not yet have access to the neurobiological research of scholar like Allan Schore⁶⁷ who has written extensively on right hemisphere interactions between child and caretaker and their importance for psychopathology. *There is growing evidence that attachment and failures in attachment between mother and child affect autonomic, neurochemical, and hormonal functions in a growing brain.*⁶⁸ These neurobiological findings are in line with above mentioned work by Jean Liedloff⁶⁹ and indicate that most cases of “inherited psychopathology” are actually a consequence of early childhood conditioning of the brain biochemistry.

The second variable which Seligman did not take into account is the growing impact of technology.⁷⁰ He must have had a hunch though, because he writes that *this fundamental change in the field of psychology is intimately related to a fundamental change in our own psychology. For the first time in history – because of technology and mass production and distribution, and for other reasons – large numbers of people are able to have a significant measure of choice and therefore of personal control over their lives. Not the least of these choices concerns our own habits of thinking. By and large, people have welcomed that control. We belong to a society that grants to its individual members powers they have never had before, a society that takes individuals’ pleasures and pains very seriously, that exalts the self and deems personal fulfillment a legitimate goal, an almost sacred right.*

In other words, according to Seligman, we have all turned into douchebags.⁷¹ I am not so sure about that. In my point of view, we are caught in a techno-economic matrix from

⁶⁷ Allan Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994)

⁶⁸ Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* (Picador, 2012)

⁶⁹ www.continuum-concept.org

⁷⁰ Compare on the impact of technology on mental health the film *The Social Dilemma*

⁷¹ Frankl goes down a similar line of argument in the German only publication [Bergerlebnis und Sinnerfahrung: Und wie stellt es der Mensch an, die Gefahr einer tendenziellen Verwöhnung und Verweichlichung zu bannen, die heraufbeschworen wird von einer technologisch perfektionierten Industriegesellschaft und einer auf totale Bedürfnisbefriedigung abgestellten Konsumgesellschaft?](#) Werfen wir doch einen Blick auf den Alltag. Der Mensch von heute muss ja eigentlich gar nicht mehr gehen. Er setzt sich einfach in seinen Wagen und – fährt. Geschweige denn, dass er laufen müsste. Doch was geschieht? Er erfindet das Jogging. Oder: Der Mensch von heute braucht nicht zu steigen, nicht einmal Stiegen zu steigen. Und was geschieht? Er setzt sich in den Kopf, auf Berge zu steigen, auf Felswände zu klettern. Mit einem Wort, er – der nackte Affe, als den ihn der Titel eines Bestsellers apostrophiert – macht es seinen Urahnen nach, die auf die Bäume klettern mussten, um sich Nahrung zu beschaffen oder vor Feinden zu flüchten – alles Dinge, die für die Affen notwendig sind, aber längst nicht mehr für ihn. Aber das ist es ja: der biologisch unterforderte Mensch arrangiert freiwillig, künstlich und absichtlich Notwendigkeiten höherer Art, indem er aus freien Stücken von sich etwas fordert, sich etwas versagt, auf etwas verzichtet. Inmitten des Wohlstandes sorgt er für Situationen des Notstandes; mitten in der Überflusgesellschaft beginnt er, sozusagen Inseln der Askese aufzuschütten – und genau darin sehe ich die Funktion, um nicht zu sagen die Mission, des Sports im Allgemeinen und des Alpinismus im Besonderen: sie sind die moderne, die säkulare Form der Askese. Die jungen Menschen sind dann

which it is hard to escape. If we apply the osmotic model once more to this question, it becomes apparent that almighty pressure comes from the niche sphere with the growing importance of technology; it is a form of pressure which penetrates in the form of automation, IT, augmented and virtual reality etc.⁷² all other spheres of existence and changes human lives beyond recognition.^{XLVIII}

Lacking clear recommendations on how to engage the body, Seligman is after all a dualist in the Christian-Judean tradition, who separates body and mind.⁷³ Cognitive behavioral psychologists also don't seem to recognize that an individual will run into difficulties trying to seal itself hermetically off from society by pretending that things will be alright; it will always be part of other systems which are bigger than itself; as such it is left with the choice between loneliness and depression or being part of society and depression, if we don't start to pair optimism with rebuilding our cultures.

For the sake of providing here a complete picture of endogenous and exogenous causes to psychopathological behavior I have created two graphs which summarize the above. The first graph shows suicide and its endogenous causes as described in the^{XLIX}

1. anatomical view
2. psychoanalytical view
3. biochemical view
4. cognitive view

The second graph describes suicide and its exogenous causes based on a longitudinal view^L:

1. Nature
2. Culture
3. Economy
4. Technology

unfähig, Frustrationen wegzustecken; sie sind unfähig, auf etwas, das sie noch nicht haben, zu verzichten oder gar etwas, das sie bereits besitzen, zu opfern. In ihrer Frustrations-Intoleranz sind die jungen Menschen nicht mehr fähig, abwendbares Leid abzuwenden und unabwendbares Leid auszuhalten, geschweige denn, dass sie Mitleid aufbrächten für jemand anderen – Mitleid kennen sie nur mit sich selbst. Doch der Mensch weiß sich zu heilen – er hat es immer schon gewusst. Und es war der Dichter Hölderlin, der diesen Sachverhalt einmal in die schönen Worte gekleidet hat: Wo die Gefahr, dort wächst auch das Rettende. Der Mensch braucht aber Spannung, und am meisten braucht er, am zuträglichsten ist ihm jene Spannung, die sich etabliert im polaren Kraftfeld zwischen einem Menschen auf der einen Seite und, auf der anderen Seite einem Ziel, das er sich setzt, einer Aufgabe, die er sich wählt, oder – um mit Karl Jaspers zu sprechen – einer Sache, die er zur seinen macht. Und glauben sie mir, einem erfahrenen Neurologen, wenn es etwas gibt, das dem Menschen über Schwierigkeiten hinwegzuhelfen vermöchte, dann ist es das Wissen um so etwas wie einen Sinn, der sozusagen darauf wartet, dass man ihn auch erfüllt. Zufällig kenne ich sehr genau die internationale Literatur betreffend die Psychologie der Kriegsgefangenenlager, und ich kann ihnen verraten, das wissenschaftliche Forschungsergebnis lautet übereinstimmend: letzten Endes war die Überlebenschance davon abhängig, ob da einer auf die Zukunft hin orientiert war, auf eine Aufgabe hin, die er in Zukunft, in der Freiheit, zu erfüllen gedachte.

⁷² On this subject: Irresistible by Adam Alter

⁷³ https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_on_the_state_of_psychology

Nature impacts the human being since it is considered to be part of existence some 200k years ago. Culture defines the human being since roughly 30k years. The economy has become a gradually more important factor ever since the Neolithic revolution. Technology has arguably become the most important factor as the Industrial Revolution carries on.

The industrial revolution and as such technology as agent of social transformation has created impact on several levels. Here are some demonstrative examples of the far-reaching consequences which drive negative mental health from procrastination to suicide:

- Community: communities have been transformed to the extent of destruction and societies have been created instead. Some societies have propelled the concept of nationalism and patriotism in order to maintain coherence and avoid anomie.
- Kinship: kinship is increasingly substituted with interest communities; local traditions yield to one's own passion.
- Families: families as smallest form of community have been reduced to the nuclear family or single households, which account in the US already for 50% of all households. As a consequence, more technology is consumed, and the self has grown in importance.
- Sleep pattern: the introduction of artificial light has changed our sleep patterns substantially. The IT revolutions since the 1970s and in particular the introduction of smart phones has led to epidemic sleep deprivation.
- Distribution of labor: specialization and automation of work has caused an alienation from work. There is reduced ownership for the manufactured product and therefore little interest in the supply chain and final quality. Reduced participation in a production process whether agricultural, technical or pedagogical leads to an identification vacuum, which is being compensated with other forms of oxytocin creation (e.g. nationalism, mass sports events, etc.). Work is probably the most underrated human instinct which if not satisfied causes mental health issues. In a world which offers less paid jobs for more people and more machines, this outlook alone is dark.
- Reduction of manual work: less manual work can have the alienation from one's own body as a consequence and manifests itself in a distortion of the body-mind equilibrium. Intellectually creatives often do sports or tend to a garden to balance body and mind. Increasingly urban lifestyles make finding such an equilibrium difficult.

19 Procrastination and Culture^{LI}

*Culture as I understand it, is essentially a product of leisure.*⁷⁴

In this context, I am intrigued by Yuval N. Harari's account on how English imperialists exterminated the aboriginal population of Tasmania: *Having survived for 10,000 years in splendid isolation, they were completely wiped out, to the last man, woman and child, within a century of Cook's arrival. European settlers first drove them off the richest parts of the island, and then, coveting even the remaining wilderness, hunted them down and killed them systematically. The few survivors were hounded into an evangelical concentration camp, where well-meaning but not particularly open-minded missionaries tried to indoctrinate them in the ways of the modern world. The Tasmanians were instructed in reading and writing, Christianity and various 'productive skills' such as sewing clothes and farming. But they refused to learn. They became ever more melancholic, stopped having children, lost all interest in life, and finally chose the only escape route from the modern world of science and progress – death.*⁷⁵

The Tasmanians were certainly not infected with sloth, but subject to an extreme form of exogenous procrastination, inflicted upon them by a new organizational layer of an utterly different and unpardoning dominant culture. They might have been regarded by the English as retard apes but were most likely spiritually more advanced than their new masters. The genocide inflicted on the Tasmanians is a similar tragedy like the WWII holocaust or the 19th century Belgian exploitation of Congo Free State. What Harari describes is a clash of cultures which are socially and psychologically on a different development stage.⁷⁶ The English did undergo serious cultural changes during the Neolithic and industrial revolution resulting in an inflated left hemisphere and a congested right hemisphere⁷⁷, whereas the Tasmanians still entirely relied on their intuition intelligence which rested in their body-mind equilibrium built through a strong physical continuum during infancy and early childhood.⁷⁸

I vividly remember a conversation I had a few years ago in Shanghai with two organizational coaches and graduates from Witten-Herdecke University, the academic epicenter of German speaking systems theory.⁷⁹ We were enthralled in a discussion about good and evil aspects of culture, in particular Chinese culture, and they tried to convince me that culture needs to be always observed without bias or judgment. I invited them to consider an extreme form of culture, that is Nazi Germany, and asked them if they would agree that the Third Reich was a culture with predominantly evil elements. They disagreed energetically and argued that Nazi Germany could not be considered a culture,

⁷⁴ Lin Yutang, The Importance of Living, Chapter 7: The Importance of Loafing

⁷⁵ Yuval Noah Harari: Sapiens; chapter 15

⁷⁶ Compare Ernst Bloch's concept of [the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous](#)

⁷⁷ Dr. Jill Bolte-Taylor, My Stroke of Insight

⁷⁸ <http://www.continuum-concept.org/>

⁷⁹ <http://www.uni-wh.de/>

because it lasted not even 20 years. I found that POV quite amusing and stopped further discussions, but it is obvious that my conversation partners had a very peculiar understanding of culture, which reflects a mainstream misconception.

People tend to believe that a culture must be something inherently positive, at least in its general layout; I believe that this confusion is created by mixing up two quite different usages of the word culture. One refers to human intellectual achievement regarded collectively, the other is the social behavior of a society in its entirety: we use the same terminology but attach a different meaning to it. Culture is not per se a set of lofty values, human rights and the fine arts, no, quite to the contrary, culture does also include our most savage forms of interaction and self-expression. Culture is therefore put simply our most complete way of living. I truly recommend at this point to watch the short 1954 Encyclopedia Britannica documentary *Man and his Culture* to comprehend the anthropological meaning of this term.⁸⁰

The second misconception relates to time and is formed again by a popular rather than an anthropological understanding. Chinese are being told that they are the descendants of a 5000-year-old culture, Western pupils are taught that the late Iron Age Hallstatt culture lasted from 1200-600 BC. We therefore believe that anything called culture must have lasted at least for several hundred years. That's of course not true. Since culture is nothing more than our way of living in its most complete understanding possible, it takes place every day and can only be perceived in a continuum with no beginning and no end. We may of course attach milestones to the human cultural development, and we do so in the social science of history, but as Heraclitus once said "pantea rhei | everything is in flow" and we therefore must go more often beyond the historical metrics which we have learned to take for granted.

In the case of Nazi Germany we are told that it lasted from 1933 when Hitler came into power until the end of WWII in 1945.⁸¹ Such a textbook history understanding does only take into account the regime sphere of that period, but it does not shed light into the cultural complexity which led to such a regime, neither does it explain which cultural elements of the Third Reich remained after 1945 in the affected societies. It is nevertheless widely known that the seeds for horrors of WWII were planted much earlier and in different layers of Western culture. Historian Niall Ferguson describes in detail how Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory was published in 1859 as one of many scientific and pseudo-scientific papers, which at that time tried to understand the differences between man and animal, and above all between human cultures. He shows that in particular Anglo-Saxon authors like George Combe or James Hunt proposed already in the first half of the 19th century racial theories which for one analyzed

⁸⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYPYd_tAnJ4

⁸¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany

differences in appearance and character and for the other established a value system, which put the white man on top of it.⁸² Much of Nazi Germany's culture and value system was therefore widely accepted at that time amongst the elites of other societies, and it was definitely not an isolated phenomenon, but the sad social climax of a general culture change in the Western hemisphere.

Similarly, it can be argued that in spite of the official end of WWII and the consecutive Nürnberg Trials, cultural elements of the Third Reich were not completely erased from German nor from other societies. Literature has produced two interesting works, which confirm such an understanding. The Austrian author Thomas Bernhard described in his novel *Extinction* the post WWII society of Austria as an amalgam of fascist and catholic culture;⁸³ the German-Hungarian author Timur Veres has only recently managed to locate the pulse of time with his satirical novel *Look Who's Back* about Adolf Hitler resurrectoring in 2011 Germany, where he starts a successful career as TV comedian and re-enters politics.⁸⁴ The Third Reich culture is never too far away and certain elements, which comparative historian Barrington Moore called Catonism are part of many contemporary societies.⁸⁵

The epidemic suffered by the last Tasmanians repeats itself in industrialized economies. The victims are not necessarily of a different race but are most likely subject to a more sensible biochemistry than the rest of the population and exposed to an unforgiving technocratic culture. A look at the probably most industrialized and capitalized society on this planet, the United States, reveals that suicide rates are particularly high amongst white Caucasian males. The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention published in April 2016 the report of a long term study of suicide. It states that in 2014, *the age-adjusted rate for males (20.7) was more than three times that for females (5.8)*.⁸⁶ The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention claims that 7 out of 10 suicides in 2014 were committed by white men.⁸⁷ One can not help but to be reminded of the 2010 movie [Company Men](#), which shows how the self-esteem movement paired with a capitalist system drives in particular white middle aged men into marginalization and depression.

Once vibrant white immigrant cultures fall apart, and marginalized Caucasians can only watch Blacks, Hispanics and Asians who comparatively thrive in smaller communities. They might still constitute America's racial elite with easier access to power, education and jobs, but they have traded their increase in wealth with a loss in social capital. Similar developments can be observed in continental Europe where lively cultures are

⁸² Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, p262f

⁸³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_\(Bernhard_novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_(Bernhard_novel))

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Look_Who%27s_Back

⁸⁵ Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*

⁸⁶ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db241.htm>

⁸⁷ <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

maintained by Turkish and Maghreb immigrants, but “native” ethnicities cease to engage in their traditions.

I vividly remember German chancellor Merkel in a public press conference during the first months of the recent “European” migration crisis. A German mother stood up in the last row of the large audience hall and expressed concerns over mostly Muslim immigrants threatening a sound environment, in which parents can pass on to their children Christian values and culture. Ms. Merkel answered after several seconds consideration that fear is never a good advisor and that she would recommend to all Germans who worry that their culture is being eroded by immigrants to practice it more. Who, she continued with a tone of indignation, does actually still understand the meaning of Christian festivities like Easter and lives by it’s meaning?⁸⁸

Assuming that marginalization and depression is the fate of most members of affluent capitalist societies – with suicides only constituting the tip of an iceberg and mass procrastination the invisible bottom - we have to ask what we can do about this crisis of modern humanity. But in order to answer this question, I believe it is necessary to confirm first that our cultures create such disasters, e.g. exogenous, not inherited endogenous factors. I firmly believe that neither lazy individuals, who have been labelled by Tim Urban a success in the animal kingdom, but an utter failure as human being, nor sensitive douchebags who have lost according to Martin Seligman and Viktor Frankl their capability to suffer properly are to be blamed for this development, but to a major extent value deprived technology, which reshapes our cultures beyond imagination and triggers our inherent passion for death. To consolidate this argument, I will turn to social psychologist Erich Fromm and his research on aggression published 1973 in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*:

Even the most sadistic and destructive man is human, as human as the saint. He can be called a warped and sick man who has failed to achieve a better answer to the challenge of having been born human, and this is true; he can also be called a man who took the wrong way in search of his salvation.⁸⁹ These considerations by no means imply, however, that destructiveness and cruelty are not vicious; they only imply that vice is human. They are indeed destructive of life, of body and spirit, destructive not only of the victim but of the destroyer himself. They constitute a paradox: they express life turning against itself in the striving to make sense of it. They are the only true perversion. Understanding them does not

⁸⁸ The 40 day fastening period, which is part of the preparation for Easter, reflects a practice which can be found in many cultures. Fastening has an essential purpose in purifying the body to be able to listen to the soul. But both Easter and Christmas have been perverted in our affluent societies into periods of increased consumption.

⁸⁹ “Salvation” comes from the Latin root sal, “salt” (in Spanish salud, “health”). The meaning stems from the fact that salt protects meat from decomposition; “salvation” is the protection of man from decomposition (to protect his health and well-being). In this sense each man needs “salvation” (in a nontheological sense).

*mean condoning them. But unless we understand them, we have no way to recognize how they may be reduced, and what factors tend to increase them.*⁹⁰

Such understanding is of particular importance today, when sensitivity toward destructiveness-cruelty is rapidly diminishing, and necrophilia, the attraction to what is dead, decaying, lifeless, and purely mechanical, is increasing throughout our cybernetic industrial society. The spirit of necrophilia was expressed first in literary form by F. T. Marinetti in his Futurist Manifesto 1909. The same tendency can be seen in much of the art and literature of the last decades that exhibits a particular fascination with all that is decayed, unalive, destructive, and mechanical.⁹¹ The Falangist motto, "Long live death", threatens to become the secret principle of a society in which the conquest of nature by the machine constitutes the very meaning of progress, and where the living person comes as an appendix to the machine.

One of Fromm's achievements in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* is the establishment of a mitigating position between instinctivists and behaviorists: an 'and' instead of an 'either or'. He brilliantly concludes that *the man of the instinctivists lives in the past of the species, as the man of the behaviorists lives the present of his social system. The former is a machine that can only produce inherited patterns of the past; the latter is a machine that can only produce social patterns of the present. Instinctivism and behaviorism have one basic premise in common: that man has no psyche with its own structure and its own laws. [...]*

Fromm and his contemporary Maslow could therefore be called the true fathers of (Western) positive psychology, because they both believed in man's potential to direct himself towards a better future. One could of course also argue on a meta-psychological level, that they are only two outstanding scholars in the long trajectory of Western psychology developing from a focus on rational intelligence to a balance between rational and intuitive intelligence; an argument which would be in line with Karl Jasper's theory of the axial age and its consequences.

On this trajectory of Western psychology, I would like to simplify again, for the purpose of making an argument, modern positive psychologists like Seligman took the

⁹⁰ Lin Yutang came to a similar conclusion as Fromm about two decades earlier. In *Importance of Living* he writes: *The reasonable attitude is, since we've got this human nature, let's start with it. Besides, there is no escaping from it anyway. Passions and instincts are originally good or originally bad, but there is not much use talking about them, is there? On the other hand, there is the danger of our being enslaved by them. Just stay in the middle of the road. The reasonable attitude creates such a forgiving kind of philosophy that, at least to a cultured, broadminded scholar who lives according to the spirit of reasonableness, any human error or misbehavior whatsoever, legal or moral or political, which can be labeled as "common human nature" (more literally, "man's normal passions") is excusable.*

⁹¹ compare the 1998 novel [American Psycho](#) by Bret Easton Ellis, which is certainly a pinnacle product of literature describing the necrophile capitalist culture and did somehow anticipate the GFC

deterministic views of instinctivists like Lorenz and behaviorists like Skinner, and turned them into a single constructivist one: Man can exert a considerable control over his instincts (which Fromm calls passions to demonstrate the difference) and does not need to be manipulated by his environment. What positive psychologists do not answer, is how we change our cultures to provide a setting which actually nurtures from the outside the behavior and cognition that they want people to build up within. I clearly understand that answering this question is not the role of a clinical psychologist, but if we want to find a cure against the diagnosed psychopathological epidemic, we have to think beyond the limitations of our disciplines or revert to a discipline being large enough to encompass all the required knowledge which must be considered to come up with an out of the box solution to an evidently pressing problem.

The only discipline applicable that comes to my mind is anthropology,^{LII} which at least in its US definition encompasses the four realms of archeology, biology, linguistics and cultural studies, and therefore in the widest sense of the meaning the study of man:

1. Archeology: the study of human environment history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts and other physical remains.
2. Biology: the study of living organisms, in this case man and the organisms he interacts with, divided into many specialized fields that cover their morphology, physiology, anatomy, behavior, origin, and distribution.
3. Linguistics: either spoken or written communication, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way
4. Culture: the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society.⁹²

It is again Fromm who resorts to anthropological studies to differentiate between three categories of cultures according to their type of aggressiveness.^{LIII}

- A. **Life-affirmative societies** emphasize the *preservation and growth of life in all its forms. There is a minimum of hostility, violence or cruelty among people, no harsh punishment, hardly any crime and the institution of war is absent or plays an exceedingly small role. Children are treated with kindness, there is no severe corporal punishment; women are in general considered equal to men, or at least not exploited or humiliated; there is a generally permissive and affirmative attitude toward sex. There is very little envy, covetousness, greed, and exploitativeness. There is also little competition and individualism and a great deal of cooperation; personal property is only in things that are used. There is a general attitude of trust and confidence, not only in others, but particularly in nature; a general prevalence of good humor, and a relative absence of depressive moods.*
- B. **Non-destructive-aggressive societies** share with A. systems the basic element of *not being destructive, but differ in that aggressiveness and war, although not central are normal occurrences, and competition, hierarchy and individualism are present.*

⁹² Mark Peterson: [What is Anthropology?](#)

They do not have the kind of gentleness and trust characteristic for A. systems. B. systems could perhaps best be characterized by being imbued with a spirit of male aggressiveness, individualism, the desire to get things and accomplish tasks.

- C. ***Destructive societies*** are very distinct from A. and B. and are characterized by much interpersonal violence, aggression, and cruelty both within the tribe and against others, a pleasure in war, maliciousness, and treachery. The whole atmosphere of life is one of hostility, tension, and fear. There is a great deal of competition, a great emphasis on private property (if not in material things then in symbols), strict hierarchies, and a considerable amount of war making.

Fromm's categorization has more relevance than ever before, because globalization leads to a merging of hitherto separate cultures^{LIV} and the creation of one unified environment. Even though we might continue to speak different languages, differ in our physiognomies and think that we behave differently, it is obvious to the global traveler that urbanites of larger cities already share increasingly similar lifestyles (yet another modern term, which encompasses much of the anthropological term culture). Capitalism and consumerism have invaded our societies, no matter if the government sphere pretends to follow democratic or communist ideologies. Technologies and their standards provide a global framework within which societies are built. Only a few national and corporate innovation leaders can set rules and provide guidelines, the majority of actors has to follow en route. The internationalization of laws and regulations, which started after WWII rides the surf of technology and technology's verbalized standards increase at the same, albeit delayed, pace.

The European Union provides a great example to demonstrate the above described development. The so called *Acquis Communautaire*, the body of accumulated EU legislation, legal acts, and court decisions constitutes approx. 90% of EU member state laws; indicating that member states have more or less ceased to exist in this realm and have merged their legal cultural identity to a large extent with their fellow EU nations. Laws and directives which regulate e.g. entire supply chains or hygiene standards for the production of food have a deep impact on how we organize our daily lives. Only to name one example: the plurality of small butcheries or grocery stores disappeared during the last few decades in advanced economies and disappears currently in emerging economies, because their owners can't afford legally required cooling infrastructure; the monolithic industrial culture of large centralized slaughterhouses and supermarket chains takes over. But what happens? The passion for life, in the words of Fromm, manifests itself in a home cooking movement propelled by protagonists like Jamie Oliver, family owned micro-breweries mushroom in certain regions of the developed world and people flock in herds to farms, which sell their own organic produce.

Without ignoring the evident advantages of internationalization and standardization, it doesn't take an oracle to forecast a reduction of the organic and a spread of a mechanistic

behavior; our technocratic societies create overregulated cultures, which produce individuals who blindly follow laws and regulations, which they take for granted for they do not know better or different. The resulting learned helplessness⁹³ leads to an increase in exogenous procrastination and a reduction of the enlightened playground. ^{LV}At a crossroad of humanity turning into one cultural habitat, it is of paramount importance that we create awareness of cultural elements which foster organic behavior and reduce the impact of mechanistic behavior to a sound level.

Forced to stay in New York longer than intended by the outbreak of the Chinese civil war, Lin Yutang wrote in 1935 about the imminent merging of different lifestyles into one global culture in *The Importance of Living: I do not know if eventually the West and the East will meet; the plain fact is that they are meeting now, and are going to meet more and more closely as modern civilization spreads, with the increase of communication facilities. At least, in China, we are not going to defy this machine civilization, and there the problem will have to be worked out as to how we are going to merge these two cultures, the ancient Chinese philosophy of life and the modern technological civilization, and integrate them into a sort of working way of life. [...] After all, the machine culture is rapidly bringing us nearer to the age of leisure, and man will be compelled to play more and work less. It is all a matter of environment, and when man finds leisure hanging on his hand, he will be forced to think more about the ways and means of wisely enjoying his leisure, conferred upon him, against his will, by rapidly improving methods of quick production. [...] The constant rush for progress must certainly one day reach a point when man will be tired of it all and will begin to take stock of his conquests in the material world. I cannot believe that, with the coming of better material conditions of life, when diseases are eliminated, poverty is decreased and man's expectation of life is prolonged and food is plentiful, man will care to be as busy as he is today. I'm not so sure that a lazier temperament will not arise as a result of this new environment.*

Now, many techniques are available, both ancient and modern, which support the individual in its growth, but under extreme conditions all these efforts of the individual to do so are in vain and it will only apply limited survival mechanisms to navigate within the given structure of its society. Tasmanians under British colonial rule, Jews in Nazi concentration camps, Uyghurs in Chinese gulags or working-class people in highly industrialized societies,⁹⁴ might only be able to attach to their life one form of meaning: suffering. I agree with Frankl that *even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself. He may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph.*⁹⁵ But at what price?

⁹³ Follow up thought: dissect the German translation of learned helplessness: erlernte (ohn)macht

⁹⁴ I do use this term not in the traditional sense, but in the sense of people who rely on their employment for a living, i.e. independent of their educational background

⁹⁵ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Shouldn't it be our foremost responsibility to not let such destructive cultures manifest themselves in our societies?⁹⁶

So, where to go from here? A reviewer of Fromm's work in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry wrote: *While his theories are thought-provoking and the character analysis, he uses to illustrate them fascinating, the book contains very little scientific data to justify Fromm's statements. This is especially disappointing since he uses a wealth of scientific material to invalidate previous theories.*⁹⁷ I would like to add to this disappointment that Fromm did not refer to the causality between industrialization and body alienation. However, I absolutely agree with his analysis that a society's culture needs to be changed to change man's passion. I avoid speaking from a cultural revolution, because this term has such a negative connotation in Chinese history, but a well-meant cultural revolution is probably what mankind needs indeed. Without categorizing certain modern nations according to Fromm's above classification, it is apparent, that a technocratic and thus necrophile culture, which generally favors a dominant left hemisphere over a strong right hemisphere, spreads rapidly and might well turn into our global culture since the G2 seem to converge more and more in their set of values.

Like Fromm, I was not able to provide any data yet, but I believe that it has been made clear that culture is paramount to decrease or increase procrastination. A culture which diminishes the body-mind equilibrium, tends to create rational intelligence and destroys intuitive intelligence, which leads to psychopathological conditions on epidemic scale. We need to design a culture, which builds intuitional intelligence, with the observational tools of anthropology and disseminate this cultural design mainly within our educational systems. But how does a culture look like that balances the intuitive and the rational mind and favors the passion for life over the passion for death? Fromm tried to answer this question in *The Sane Society*, but I would like to try here an answer from the "Far East Asian" point of view as opposed to the Western perspective.

The sociologist Timothy Shortell describes this process of IR caused social transformation by referring to the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who used the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to refer to the distinction between societies organized on the basis of kinship and tradition, on the one hand, and by specialization and self-interest, on the other. As modern societies become more urban and industrial, the former is replaced by the latter. French sociologist Emile Durkheim believed that solidarity was the normal

⁹⁶ And why have we barred in our modern industrial societies even this last avenue to meaning? Seligman calls this bar the self-esteem movement; Frankl writes that in the present day culture of the United States *the incurable sufferer is given very little opportunity to be proud of his suffering and to consider it ennobling rather than degrading so that he is not only unhappy, but also ashamed of being unhappy.*

⁹⁷ <http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/41/3/292.3.citation?41/3/292-b>

*condition of society, and even though he recognized the turmoil associated with industrialization, he considered conflict abnormal or pathological.*⁹⁸

Even though the democratic West has experienced the longest peace period in recorded history conflict - whether open or latent in the form of depression or burn out - is prevalent; and eroding social systems even in wealthy economies point at an ever-growing solidarity vacuum. Deprived of our connection to our body, we have in fact turned into douchebags who prefer to turn their aggression against themselves by slipping into compensational consumption and the dark playground^{LVI} instead of trying to regain control of our lives. Man is pushed by culture in the dark playground⁹⁹, while the monkey enjoys the enlightened playground – as they always did.

Some scholars like Stephen Pinker do not agree; they see a surprising decline in violence, but overlook that both benign as well as malign aggression can be turned inwards.¹⁰⁰ By looking at violence directed at the other only, we omit violence which is directed at the self: procrastination, obesity, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, depression, burn out syndrome, etc. are modern forms of how violence manifests itself in a world, which does not allow any more violence against the other. What Henry Kissinger describes as a stalemate of nuclear proliferation in the geopolitical realm of the regime sphere¹⁰¹, did also happen for the individual in the age of electronic finger prints, cross border controls, face recognition and retina scans: neither the national nor the individual villain can hide himself from persecution in some Argentinian hamlet like Nazi criminals did after WWII. Man is not anymore permitted to vent his aggression into open violence; but in particular malign aggression increases in the course of the industrialization of our societies. Looking at the comprehensive global mental health data *The Matrix* is not a science fiction movie but a metaphor for reality: a growing number of people who are caught in societies who feed them with sensory stimulation but don't encourage self-guidance and self-responsibility. In the words of Fromm, we have created cultures which give rise to the passion for death instead of the passion for live.

20 Procrastination and Education

⁹⁸ Medieval Continental European, in particular German craftsmanship was dubbed as *Goldenes Handwerk*. Then because of the protection which the guilds provided, now because modern psychology has shown that craftsmanship is a sure vehicle into the flow state of mind.

⁹⁸ Prof. Timothy Shortell, Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College, CUNY: [Division of Labor & Social Integration](#)

⁹⁹ Compare Sigmund Freud's [Civilization and its Discontent](#)

¹⁰⁰ https://www.ted.com/talks/steven_pinker_on_the_myth_of_violence

¹⁰¹ Henry Kissinger, World Order

If anthropology is the field which can create an interdisciplinary understanding of the underlying reasons, why our cultures have turned into rather mechanistic and necrophile systems, pedagogy would be the discipline to disseminate the respective findings. It is though our educational systems which have suffered most in the course of industrialization, because man, too, has turned into a product being churned out by those institutions which have forgotten their original purpose of lifting man above himself to unfold his uttermost potential.

Ken Robinson has summarized the tragedy of our schools in three hugely popular TED talks and calls for a revolution in education. He acknowledges that our kindergartens, schools and universities train all children to become university professors and R&D scientists, but only a few of them are meant to be. He argues that the supremacy of competitive science based examinations needs to be balanced with a cooperative teaching method which nurtures the plurality in man.¹⁰² Homo sapiens is not yet another machine, which can be produced more efficient and resource optimized. Each one of us is a unique human being, which needs to learn the skills to tap into this uniqueness, and both educators and parents must be trained to mine for diverse and rare human resources as Robinson tells us:

I meet all kinds of people who don't enjoy what they do. They simply go through their lives getting on with it. They get no great pleasure from what they do. They endure it rather than enjoy it and wait for the weekend. But I also meet people who love what they do and couldn't imagine doing anything else. If you said, "Don't do this anymore," they'd wonder what you're talking about. It isn't what they do, it's who they are. They say, "But this is me, you know. It would be foolish to abandon this, because it speaks to my most authentic self." And it's not true of enough people. In fact, on the contrary, I think it's still true of a minority of people. And I think there are many possible explanations for it. And high among them is education, because education, in a way, dislocates very many people from their natural talents. And human resources are like natural resources; they're often buried deep. You have to go looking for them, they're not just lying around on the surface. You have to create the circumstances where they show themselves. And you might imagine education would be the way that happens, but too often, it's not. Every education system in the world is being reformed at the moment and it's not enough. Reform is no use anymore, because that's simply improving a broken model. What we need -- and the word's been used many times in the past few days -- is not evolution, but a revolution in education. This has to be transformed into something else.

Epilogue

¹⁰² Sir Ken Robison in a 2010 TED talk: [Bring on the Learning Revolution](#)

This paper started in spring 2016 as a PhD research project on the history, status quo, outlook and causes of suicide in Fareast Asian Nations in general and China in particular. It intended to shed light on suicide data, in particular on child suicide data, as an indicator of “cultural” sanity and wanted to assess whether a widely discussed and likely pax sinica will be any better than the prevailing pax americana.

The project was originally structured in five parts, which have turned into separate research projects.

1. The Past and Future of Work
2. On Procrastination and the Enlightened Playground
3. On Industrial and Integral Education
4. On China’s Cultural Superiority
5. Statistical and Field Analysis of Suicide Data

WHO suicide statistics indicate that Chinese citizens are despite living in a totalitarian regime healthier than most Western nationals. This implies that Chinese culture is superior to Western culture and more likely to provide a social framework which enables the individual to come to terms with the social changes caused by the Industrial Revolution and the cybernation of our societies. Part 4 of the PhD project was designed to identify the elements of Chinese culture which help the regime to keep suicide numbers low despite the most accelerated industrial revolution in human history. Following assumptions were made based on own experience and observation:

Chinese culture is essentially monistic

Language and writing nurture the development of the right brain hemisphere

Chinese society is not yet as substantially affected by 250-years industrial alienation as Western industrialized societies, in particular in respect to the corrosion of the family

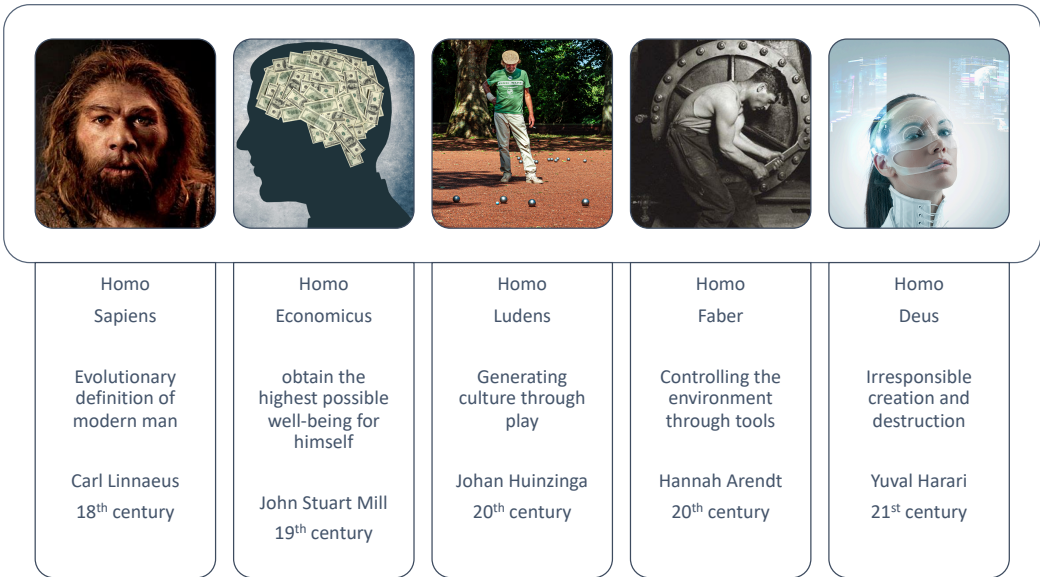
Part 1 and 2 have sat more or less completed on my desktop since 2017. When starting in 2017 to research Chinese suicide data I hit a wall of silence and secrecy. Despite a multitude of accounts on child and adolescent suicide in our Shanghai circle of friends, I was not able to get access to medical data. Even a Hong Kong clinic to which I was introduced by a befriended physician did not provide more than the data, which is published online, and which portrays China as taking a decisive detour from the Japanese and South Korean trajectory of suicide numbers.

In 2018, I worked for an entire year as a volunteer at Shanghai Lifeline¹⁰³, a suicide hotline, where I received several calls hinting at a serious mental health issue among many young Chinese women. My lack of connections in the medical and mental health industry are probably one reason for the difficulties which I experienced in collecting

¹⁰³ <https://lifeline-shanghai.com/>

data for the PhD project. Reading Tomas Plaenker’s The Landscapes of the Chinese Soul - The Enduring Presence of the Cultural Revolution revealed however a second reason: totalitarian and patriotic regimes perceive suicide as the ultimate action of subversive national subjects. Suicide turns under this light into an act of civil disobedience and brings shame upon the collective national body. The reluctance of government entities to share detailed suicide data with the general public and the reluctance of mental health professionals to provide insights in or interviews about their work is therefore an almost logical consequence.

The project would have required the skills of an investigative journalist to be continued. I do not own such skills and felt as a family man that I began to thread rather perilous grounds. As a consequence, I abandoned in summer 2019 the qualitative and quantitative research to move my focus on a social impact project¹⁰⁴ which provides a potential solution to the assumed problem: an increasingly mechanistic and necrophile culture spreading throughout our world being gradually substituted by an organic and life-affirming culture of inclusion, tolerance and respect for self, other and planet.



2017

www.telospi.com

57

¹⁰⁴ <https://new.ark.greensteps.cn/about/>

Bibliography

1. Social Psychology

- Erich Fromm - [The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness](#)
- Erich Fromm - [The Fear of Freedom](#)
- Erich Fromm - [The Sane Society](#)
- Lyman Stanford - [The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil](#)
- John Nisbett - [The Geography of Thought](#)
- Francis Fukuyama - [Trust](#)
- Jean Liedlhoff - [The Continuum Concept](#)

2. Big History

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - [Sinn und Ziel der Evolution](#)
- Spencer Wells - [The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey](#)
- Yuval Noah Harari - [Sapiens](#)
- Macquarie University Big History Institute - [Big History](#)
- Eric Chaisson - [Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature](#),
- David Christian - [Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History](#),
- Fred Spier, [Big History and the Future of Humanity](#),
- Cynthia Stokes Brown, [Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present](#)
- David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown, and Craig Benjamin - [Big History: Between Nothing and Everything](#)

3. Societal Transformation

- Wikipedia - [Transitionsforschung](#) in der Politikwissenschaft
- Philipp Christoph Schmädeke - [Der Demokratiebegriff in der Transitionsforschung: Ideengeschichtliche Ursprünge, Modellierung und konzeptionelle Konsequenzen](#)
- Andy Couturier - [A Different Kind of Luxury](#)
- [Knowledge Wars – The Global Competition between Self-Help Gurus and Institutional Authorities](#) by Eric C. Hendrics
- [Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry](#) by Nehring, D., Alvarado, E., Hendriks, E., Kerrigan, D.
- Nestor Garcia Canclini - [Hybrid Cultures](#)

4. Family Sphere

- Lin Yutang - [My Country and My People](#)
- Tomas Plaenkers - [The Landscapes of the Chinese Soul: The Enduring Presence of the Cultural Revolution](#)

5. Individual Sphere

- Chade Meng-Tan - [Search Inside Yourself](#)
- Julia Cameron - [The Artist's Way](#)
- Lin Yutang - [The Importance of Living](#)
- Jane Loevinger - [Stages of Ego Development](#)
- Thomas Binder - [Ich Entwicklung und Effektives Beraten](#)
- Abraham Maslov - [Religion, Values and Peak Experiences](#)
- Alexander Loewen - [Bioenergetics](#)

6. Niche & Technology Sphere

- [The Triple Revolution](#)
- Martin Ford - [The Rise of Robots](#)
- James Kynge - [China Shakes the World](#)
- Carl E. Schorske - [Fin-de-siecle Vienna](#)
- Daniel Levitin - [The Organized Mind](#)

7. On Education

- Ken Robinson - [The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything](#)
- Jonathan Stedall - [The Challenges of Rudolf Steiner](#)
- Julia Lange - [Transitionsforschung](#) in der Pädagogik
- Erwin Wagenhofer - [Alphabet](#)

SLIDE OVERVIEW

-
- I Start Slide
 - II Avoiding Endogenous Procrastination
 - III Tim Urban TED Talk: get some work done
 - IV Tim Urban TED Talk: easy/fun & makes sense
 - V Tim Urban TED Talk: dark playground
 - VI Tim Urban TED Talk: panic monster
 - VII Tim Urban TED Talk: suicide
 - VIII Tim Urban TED Talk: exogenous instant gratification monkeys
 - IX spheres of procrastination – osmotic perspective – endogenous <> exogenous [animate this slide?]
 - X TED talk Sting
 - XI How to be productive
 - XII Dalai Lama on what kind of people are needed in this world
 - XIII energy economy: productive, consumptive, destructive
 - XIV Paleolithic lifestyle
 - XV Mountaineering – freestyle climbing
 - XVI easy and fun & makes sense move apart from each other [need to color common ground]
 - XVII easy and fun & makes sense increase overlap [need to color common ground – show Dark Playground text only]
 - XVIII human evolution fossils
 - XIX Chart of Evolution by German Biologist [Ernst Haeckel](#), 1876
 - XX Lascaux Cave, Southern France, 18000 BC
 - XXI Monism & Dualism
 - XXII Venn diagram with man and monkey changed [animate slide?]
 - XXIII enlightened playground
 - XXIV Rubens/Brueghel: The Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man
 - XXV Adam & Eve are Chinese
 - XXVI penguin colony
 - XXVII Our Iceberg is Melting
 - XXVIII PPP traffic light
 - XXIX [Dante](#) shown holding a copy of the *Divine Comedy*, next to the entrance to Hell, the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory and the city of Florence, with the spheres of Heaven above, in [Michelino's](#) fresco
 - XXX Belphegor as pictured in the early 19th century [Dictionnaire Infernal](#)
 - XXXI Evolution of Communication
 - XXXII *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, 1624, by [Abraham Bloemaert](#). The "lazy peasants" sleep instead of work, representing the sin of sloth.
 - XXXIII habitual dark playground = depression
 - XXXIV Seligman – the positive outlook and its three life style choices
 - XXXV Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - XXXVI Lowen – bioenergetics layer formation
 - XXXVII we love fucking atheism – because you don't figure shit out by praying
 - XXXVIII God shows Abraham the way out of Egypt
 - XXXIX Balance of Body, Mind and Soul
 - XL Intuition is the whisperer of the soul
 - XLI Balance of Body, Mind and Soul
 - XLII body and mind overlap decreasing
 - XLIII Surrogates, Matrix, Wall-E
 - XLIV body and mind overlap increasing > enlightened playground = complete atonement [show overlap area in blue]
 - XLV Suicide mortality rate by sex and WHO region, 2012
 - XLVI Suicide mortality world map, WHO, 2012
 - XLVII Suicide mortality rate Western Pacific, WHO, 2012, <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/suicide>
 - XLVIII osmotic model of endogenous and exogenous procrastination
 - XLIX Suicide and endogenous causes
 - L Suicide and exogenous causes
 - LI The last surviving Tasmanians; Truganini on the far right
 - LII Anthropology: Archeology, Biology, Linguistics, Culture
 - LIJ Types of societies according to Erich Fromm
 - LIV Two societies merging because their environment overlaps
 - LV unified environment of a globalized world